

The Cathedral of Faras as a Monument of Medieval Nubian Memory

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Theoretical and Methodological Background

Although both Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, two of the founders of the field of modern memory studies, relied on examples from the remote past in their work,¹ it is the contemporary world that ultimately became the focus of this discipline. As a result, the field is now firmly grounded in psychology, sociology, modern history, and political, literary, and media studies. This does not mean that pre-modern cultures and societies have been completely left out of the picture, however. Although overshadowed by studies on the Holocaust and colonialism—the memory of which haunts modern societies—and, most recently, on the transition from the era of the written and printed word to the age of digital memory,² ancient and medieval studies have of late become a fertile soil for the most important concepts deployed in memory studies. Employing these concepts, multiple case studies on the role of memory in premodern societies have

been carried out.³ In most cases, they are based on well-researched cultures or well-documented periods in their history. The abundance and variety of materials, from written sources to archaeological finds, from and about ancient Egypt, classical Greece, the Roman Empire, and medieval Europe, allow for multifaceted research on various aspects of these civilizations by way of different methodologies. Moreover, they invite or even prompt the devising and applying of new analytic tools and methodologies that will help us to deconstruct and reconstruct the past in new ways.

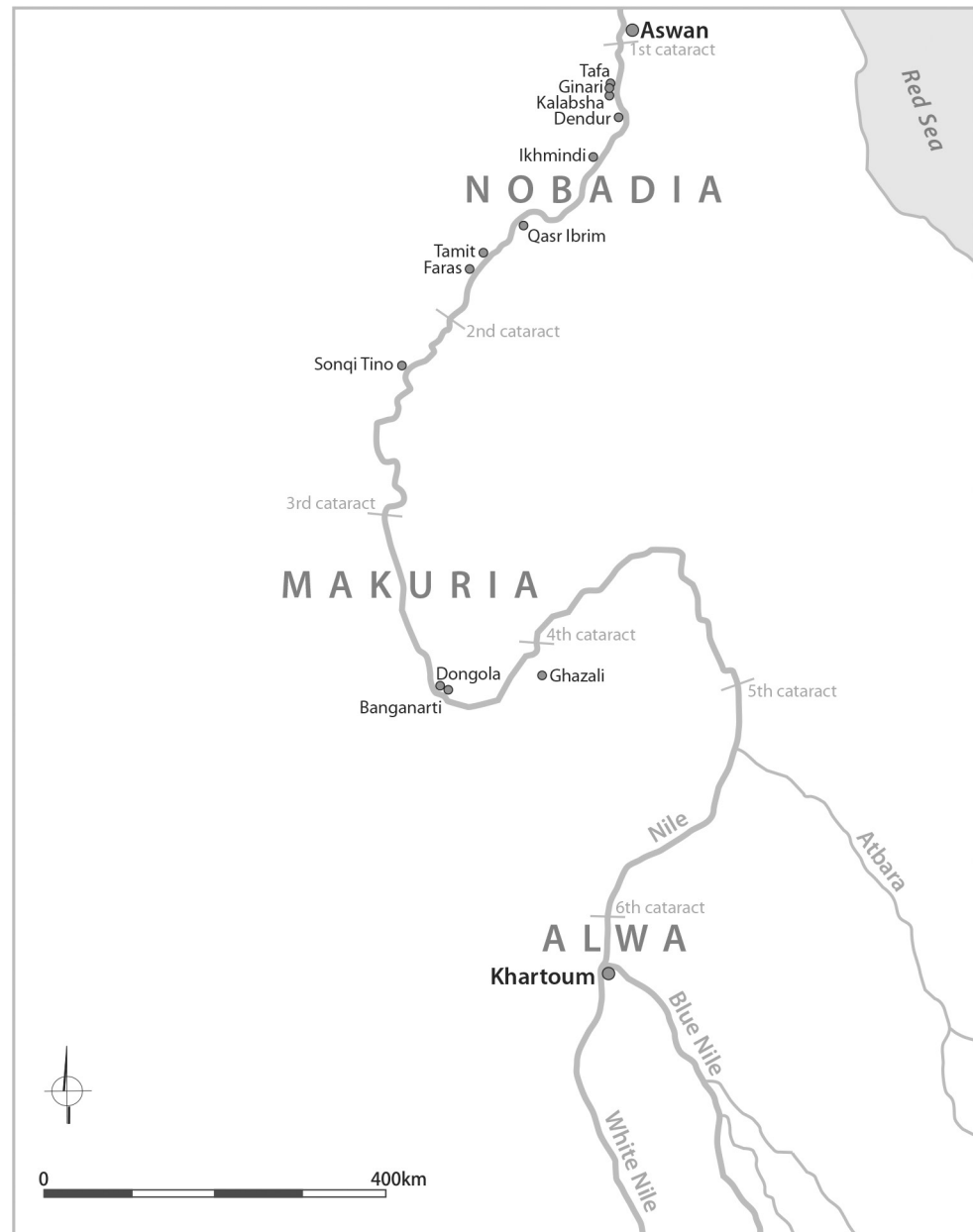
But what do we do with medieval Nubia (fig. 1), for which material at our disposal is quite limited, even

1 M. Halbwachs, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en terre sainte: Étude de mémoire collective*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1971); J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York, 2011), who discusses examples from ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and Greece.

2 For an overview of the discipline with its various trends and directions, see A. Erll and A. Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin, 2008), and A. Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. S. B. Young (Basingstoke, UK, 2011).

3 For classical antiquity, see, for example, S. E. Alcock, *Archaeologies of the Greek Past: Landscape, Monuments, and Memories* (Cambridge, 2002); E. Stein-Hölkeskamp and K.-J. Hölkeskamp, eds., *Erinnerungsorte der Antike: Die römische Welt* (Munich, 2006); eadem, eds., *Die griechische Welt: Erinnerungsorte der Antike* (Munich, 2010); N. Mathieu, *L'épître et la mémoire: Parenté et identité sociale dans les Gaules et Germanies romaines* (Rennes, 2011); K. Galinsky, ed., *Memoria Romana: Memory in Rome and Rome in Memory* (Ann Arbor, 2014); idem and K. Lapatin, eds., *Cultural Memories in the Roman Empire* (Los Angeles, 2015). For the Western Middle Ages, see, for example, M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2008); C. Treffort, *Mémoires carolingiennes: L'épître entre célébration mémorielle, genre littéraire et manifestation politique (milieu VIII^e–début XI^e siècle)* (Rennes, 2007); eadem, "Espace ecclésial et paysage mémoriel (IX^e–XIII^e siècle)," in *Espace ecclésial et liturgique au Moyen Âge*, ed. A. Baud, *Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée* 53 (Lyon, 2010), 239–52; E. Rose, *Ritual Memory: The Apocryphal Acts and Liturgical Commemoration in the Early Medieval West (c. 500–1215)* (Leiden, 2009).

Fig. 1.
Map of medieval
Nubia, identifying the
sites mentioned in the
article. Drawing by
S. Maślak, G. Ochała,
and D. Zielińska



though relatively abundant, and basic facts about its history and culture are still largely unknown?⁴ Can we

4 I use the terms “medieval Nubia” and “Christian Nubia” interchangeably throughout to designate the Christian kingdoms of Nobadia, Makuria, and Alwa in the Middle Nile Valley between the mid-sixth and fifteenth centuries. For a useful overview of medieval Nubian history and archaeology, see D. A. Welsby, *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia: Pagans, Christians and Muslims along the Middle Nile* (London, 2002); owing to intensive archaeological work in the past two decades, Welsby’s book needs a general update.

apply memory studies, identity studies, and other socio-cultural research methods here as well? And if we can, how should we proceed? In the present article I will try to demonstrate, on the basis of a case study of Faras Cathedral, one of the most important and impressive Christian Nubian buildings discovered to date,⁵ that

5 The discovery by the Polish archaeological mission to Dongola, the capital of the Kingdom of Makuria, of a huge, church-like building in the center of the city, apparently much bigger than Faras

these questions can be answered in the affirmative. I would even venture to say that we not only can, but should apply those methods, precisely because of the character and limitations of the material at hand.⁶

Memory studies is a convenient tool for supplementing existing knowledge about well-documented civilizations or for viewing them from a different angle, which leads to a better understanding of their societies. In the case of medieval Nubia, however, we are concerned not with a *better* understanding, but with an understanding in general. It is true that our source base is quite rich, comprising external literary, internal epigraphic and papyrological (both literary and nonliterary), archaeological, and art-historical materials, and thus seemingly providing enough variety of information on medieval Nubian society and its culture. When one takes a closer look at these sources, however, one cannot help but become aware of their serious limitations in terms of content, character, and reliability, such as the absolute lack of internal historiographic sources, the selectivity and bias of external sources, the predominantly religious and formulaic character of epigraphic evidence, and the general problems (grammatical and lexical) relating to understanding texts written in the local Old Nubian language.⁷

When approached from a traditional methodological angle, all these sources allow for the establishing of some basic facts about medieval Nubian society, viz., that the Nubians surely knew their Bible and prayers, that at least some of them could read and write in as many as three languages (Greek, Sahidic Coptic, Old Nubian), and that they modeled their art, literary production, church and state apparatuses, and

liturgy on external patterns mixed with local elements. The general image that emerges is hardly surprising: a pious Christian society, on the spiritual level focused on the salvation of their souls, and on the more earthly level, aspiring to be a part of the wider Eastern Christian *oikoumene*. If we delve further, however, to learn, for instance, what the mindset of an average Nubian was, what it meant for them to be part of this society, or what drove them to follow external models in different aspects of their life, traditional methodologies are not enough. The present article is thus a first attempt to look at medieval Nubian society through the lens of memory studies.

With such a limited source base, replete with material and interpretative gaps, it is impossible to take one of the existing theories of memory studies, either Maurice Halbwachs's social memory, Jan and Aleida Assmann's cultural memory, or Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, and analyze the data within its framework. My study is instead material oriented; in the spirit of Aby Warburg's inductive approach to works of art as the principal medium of memory, my point of departure is the sources that we possess from Christian Nubia.⁸ It is these sources that create the framework in which I try to apply different concepts of memory. This is all the more justified since all these theories are not mutually exclusive, but rather supplement one another, and they are all driven by four central questions: *what is remembered, by whom, how, and why*.

My study is thus grounded in two general premises of memory studies that can be found in the most important works in the field:

1. Memory, be it individual/communicative or collective/cultural, is a social phenomenon and cannot work without a referent and referrer;⁹

8 Unlike Assmann, who, in his programmatic *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, first builds a theoretical framework and then fills it with several representative examples. For a concise summary of Warburg's research, see Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 19–22.

9 M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1976), xvi: "C'est en ce sens qu'il existerait une mémoire collective et des cadres sociaux de la mémoire, et c'est dans la mesure où notre pensée individuelle se replace dans ces cadres et participe à cette mémoire qu'elle serait capable de se souvenir"; Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 5: "However, the contents of this [individual] memory, the ways in which they are organized, and the length of time they last are for the most part not a matter of internal storage or control but of the external conditions imposed by society and cultural contexts";

Cathedral, will definitely change this assessment (<https://pcma.uw.edu.pl/en/2021/05/26/cathedral-of-dongola-new-discoveries-in-sudan/>, accessed 1 June 2021).

6 One should mention in this context two contributions: L. Török, "Sacred Landscape, Historical Identity and Memory: Aspects of Napatan and Meroitic Urban Architecture," in *Nubian Studies 1998: Proceedings of the Ninth Conference of the International Society of Nubian Studies, August 21–26, 1998, Boston, Massachusetts*, ed. T. Kendall (Boston, 2004), 157–75; and J. Pope, "History and the Kushite Royal Inscriptions," in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Nubia*, ed. G. Emberling and B. B. Williams (New York, 2020), 395–410, which are—to the best of my knowledge—the only attempts to study "Kushite perceptions and uses of the past" (Pope, "History," 395).

7 Generally on Old Nubian, see the introduction in V. W. J. van Gerven Oei, *A Reference Grammar of Old Nubian*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 299 (Leuven, 2021), 1–31.

2. Memory is a medial phenomenon and has to have carriers, defined as broadly as possible, to be transmitted, perceived, and understood.¹⁰

Three other concepts, not directly stemming from memory studies, underlie the present study and make it possible to analyze the material within the framework of memory studies. The first is the notion of orality/aurality of written texts from antiquity and the Middle Ages, which is increasingly prevalent in modern-day scholarship,¹¹ and, according to which, most inscriptions left in places/spaces that were accessible to others were destined to be read aloud. Of course, there were also texts that were apparently not supposed to be read at all, but only viewed. Their reception is governed by the second concept, that of the iconicity of inscriptions, according to which the message of a text is perceived not only through its contents, but also through its form and its very presence in a given space; the written word is said to have a “magical power,” affecting those who could and could not understand it alike.¹² The last con-

cept, which has also gained traction in scholarship in recent years, is the notion of interactivity, according to which the meaning of any publicly displayed object,¹³ whether an inscription, wall painting, or architectural feature, is construed by its audience as a triangle, connecting content, context, and perception (visual, audial, sensual).¹⁴ These three concepts serve to assign the role of active agents also to the illiterate, who certainly constituted a large majority in premodern societies, and who must have had their ways of participating in the literary culture.

Thus, after a brief presentation of the site and the “memorial” material it yielded, the article proceeds to a more technical analysis of the persons and events commemorated in the complex and the methods of their commemoration (*what, by whom, and how*), which then helps elucidate the *why* of Nubian memory. In the concluding section, I will offer a more theoretical approach to some concepts of memory studies as seen through the perspective of medieval Nubian sources.

The Cathedral of Faras as an Interpretative Unit

The cathedral of Faras (ancient Pachoras) is of one of the most important buildings for the history of modern Nubian studies. It was discovered in the 1960s by Polish archaeologists during a salvage campaign connected with the flooding of Lake Nubia. The impressive building, still several meters tall at the moment of discovery, could not be saved in its entirety, but the great

Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 9: “The individual person always remembers within sociocultural contexts.”

10 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 6–7: “Rituals are part of cultural memory because they are the form through which cultural meaning is both handed down and brought to present life. The same applies to things once they point to a meaning that goes beyond their practical purpose: symbols; icons; representations such as monuments, tombs, temples, idols; and so forth, all transcend the borders of object-memory because they make the implicit index of time and identity explicit”; Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 113–43.

11 See, for ancient Greece, J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: Anthropologie de la lecture en Grèce ancienne* (Paris, 1988); for the Byzantine Empire, A. Papalexandrou, “Echoes of Orality in the Monumental Inscriptions of Byzantium,” in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. L. James (Cambridge, 2007), 161–87, 210–13; for Nubia, J. van der Vliet, “‘What Is Man?’: The Nubian Tradition of Coptic Funerary Inscriptions,” in *Nubian Voices: Studies in Christian Nubian Culture*, ed. A. Łajtar and J. van der Vliet, *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* Suppl. 15 (Warsaw, 2011), 171–224.

12 See, for example, L. James, “‘And Shall These Mute Stones Speak?’: Text as Art,” in eadem, *Art and Text*, 188–206; A. Eastmond, “Textual Icons: Viewing Inscriptions in Medieval Georgia,” in *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. idem (New York, 2015), 76–98; and C. Jolivet-Lévy, “Inscriptions et images dans les églises byzantines de Cappadoce: Visibilité/lisibilité, interactions et fonctions,” in *Visibilité et présence de l’image dans l’espace ecclésial: Byzance et Moyen Âge occidental*, ed. S. Brodbeck and A.-O. Poilpré, *Byzantina Sorbonensia* 30 (Paris, 2019), 379–408, at 380–82; see also O. Grabar, “Graffiti or Proclamations: Why Write on Buildings?” in *The Cairo Heritage*, ed. D. Behrens-Abouseif (Cairo, 2000), 69–75,

at 74. For Christian Nubia, see A. Tsakos, “The Cryptogram MXI as a Variant of the Cryptogram XMI: On Text and Image in Christian Nubia,” in *Nubian Voices II: New Texts and Studies on Christian Nubian Culture*, ed. A. Łajtar, G. Ochała, and J. van der Vliet, *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* Suppl. 27 (Warsaw, 2015), 245–62; A. Łajtar and J. van der Vliet, *Empowering the Dead in Christian Nubia: The Texts from a Medieval Funerary Complex in Dongola*, *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* Suppl. 32 (Warsaw, 2017), 251–59.

13 That is, not purposely concealed.

14 See for example, A. Papalexandrou, “Text in Context: Eloquent Monuments and the Byzantine Beholder,” *Word & Image* 17 (2001): 259–83, and eadem, “Echoes of Orality,” for the Byzantine Empire; A. M. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community* (Cambridge, 2009), and Eastmond, *Viewing Inscriptions*, for late antiquity and Middle Ages in general; and J. van der Vliet, “The Wisdom of the Wall: Innovation in Monastic Epigraphy,” in *Writing and Communication in Early Egyptian Monasticism*, ed. M. Choat and M. C. Giorda (Leiden, 2017), 151–64, for the medieval Nile Valley.

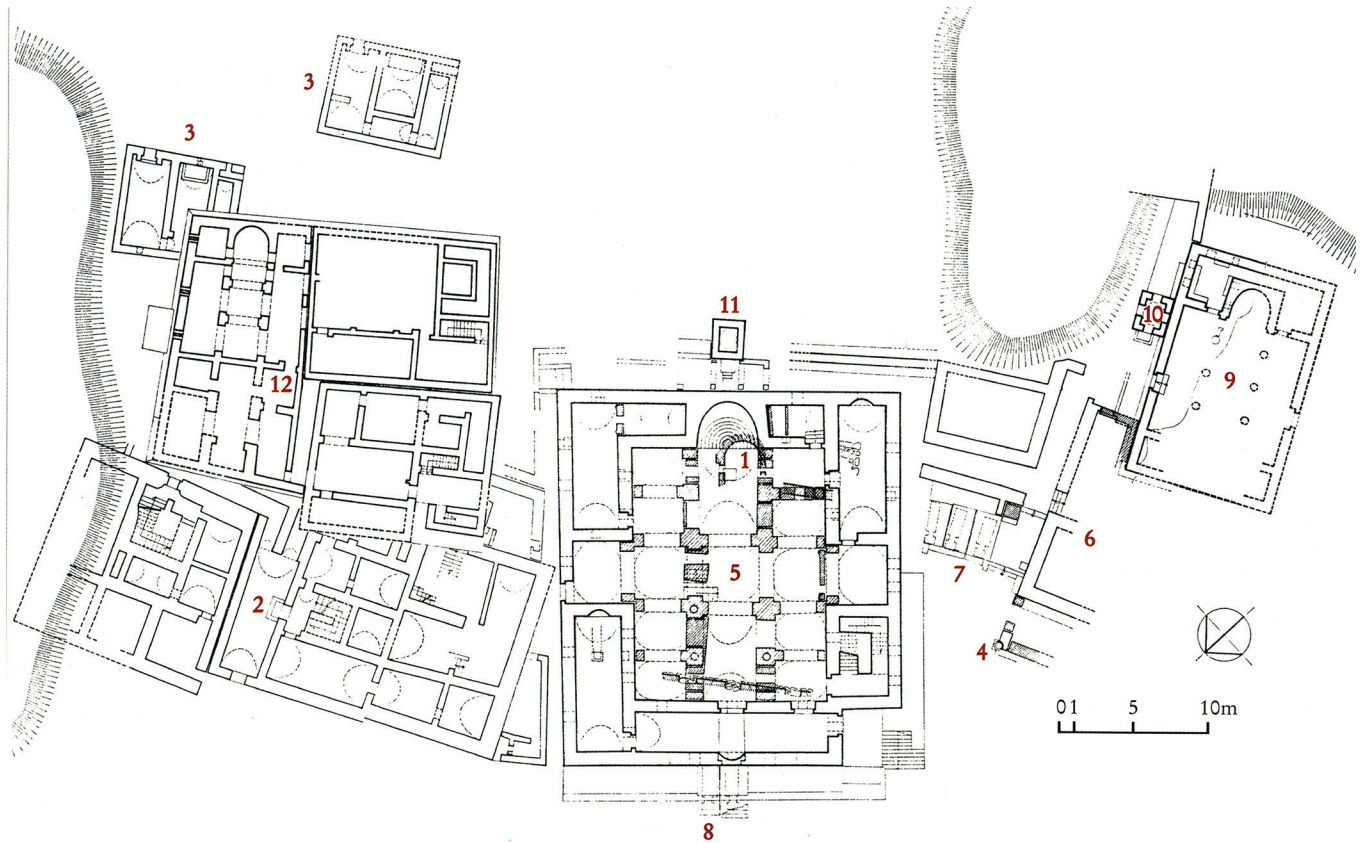


Fig. 2. Ground plan of Polish excavations at Faras. The following features will be discussed: (4) entrance to the cathedral square; (5) cathedral; (6) so-called *episkopeion*; (7) southern tombs; (8) western tombs; (10) tomb of Petros I; (11) eastern tombs. Drawing by A. Ostrasz, courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw

majority of its interior ornamentation was removed from the walls and transferred to the national museums in Khartoum and Warsaw.

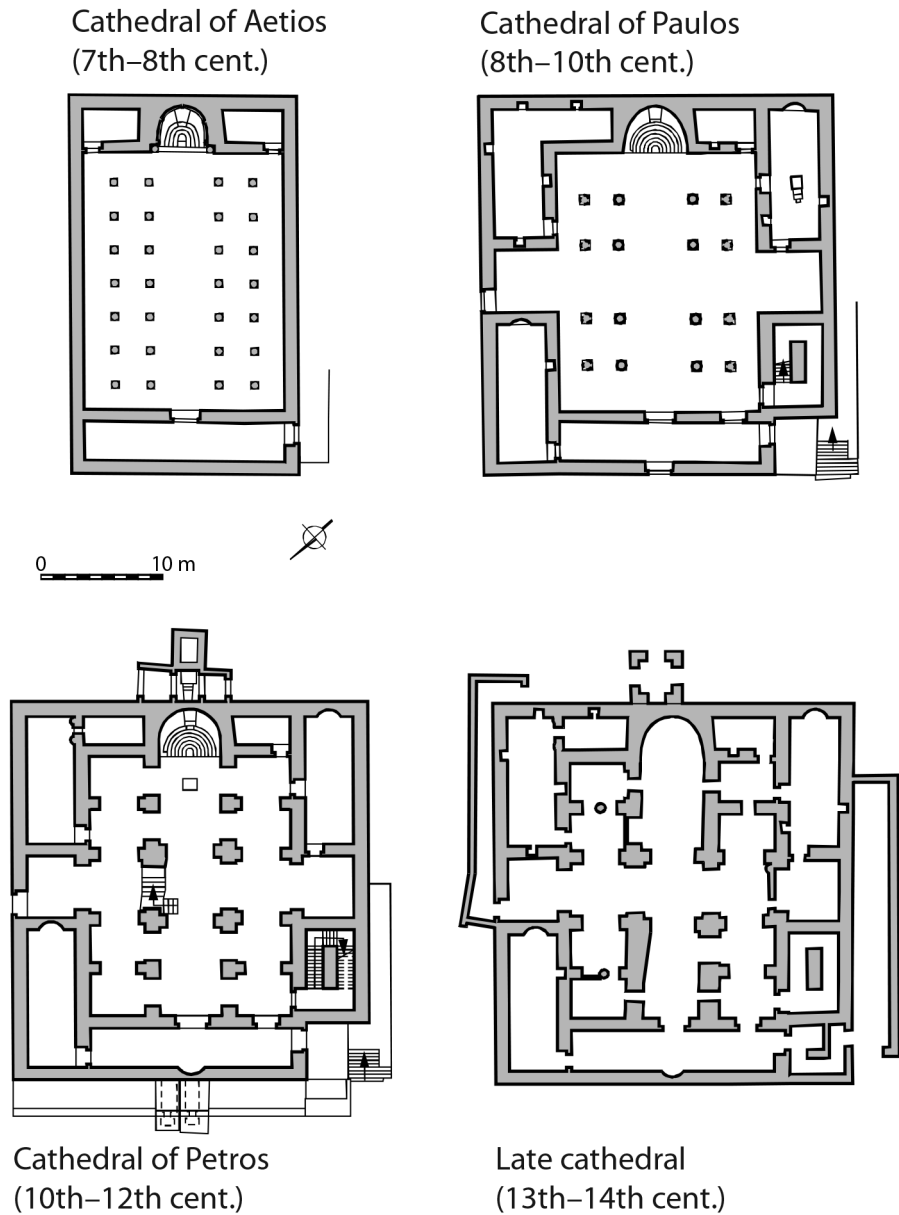
The existence of magnificent wall paintings and countless wall inscriptions, as well as a number of other archaeological and art-historical features—even if not all of them have been adequately published (or published at all)—makes the whole cathedral complex one of the very few places on the archaeological map of Christian Nubia that allows for a comprehensive analysis on the basis of memory studies. Moreover, many of its features in their original medieval setting have been preserved in an excellent state, which greatly enhances interpretative perspectives.¹⁵

15 The bibliography of Faras Cathedral is enormous; suffice it to mention here several of the most important books: two archaeological

The site consisted of the church itself as well as different structures surrounding it, all forming a monumental complex in the heart of the city (fig. 2). Situated on a high hill, the complex towered above the surroundings, which obviously added to its monumentality.

reports by K. Michałowski, *Faras: Fouilles polonaises 1961*, Faras 1 (Warsaw, 1962) and *Faras: Fouilles polonaises 1961–1962*, Faras 2 (Warsaw, 1965); a historical monograph of the Faras bishopric by S. Jakobielski, *A History of the Bishopric of Pachoras on the Basis of Coptic Inscriptions*, Faras 3 (Warsaw, 1972); an edition of Greek inscriptions by J. Kubińska, *Inscriptions grecques chrétiennes*, Faras 4 (Warsaw, 1974); a study of the architecture of the complex by W. Godlewski, *Pachoras: The Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros. The Architecture*, trans. I. Zych, Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean Suppl. 1 (Warsaw, 2006); and the catalogue of wall paintings by S. Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras: The Wall Paintings from the Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros*, trans. B. Gostyńska, Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean Monographs 4 (Warsaw, 2017).

Fig. 3.
Architectural development
of Faras Cathedral. Drawing
by M. Puzzkarski, courtesy
of the Polish Centre of
Mediterranean Archaeology
of the University of Warsaw



According to archaeological and architectural analyses, the first cathedral was constructed on the spot in the 630s, during the episcopate of Bishop Aetios, apparently the first hierarch of the Faras see. It was almost completely dismantled at the beginning of the eighth century, in the time of Bishop Paulos (ca. 690–ca. 709). In its place, a five-aisle basilica with a transversal aisle and L-shaped lateral spaces was erected. Its roof was flat and resting on sixteen columns. During the episcopate of Petros I (974–997), the roofing system was completely changed: the columns were replaced by eight

massive brick pillars, which supported barrel vaults and a central dome. In the terminal phase of use, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, modifications were introduced in the interior, which, however, did not affect the general layout. The cathedral was abandoned in the fourteenth century (fig. 3).¹⁶

The excavations at the cathedral brought to light one of the most impressive series of wall paintings from the Middle Nile Valley. The catalogue of murals

16 Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 26–30, and *passim*.

totals 155 items, of which one dates to its original construction phase, the cathedral of Aetios. The remaining 154 date from different periods of the building, starting with the time of Paulos. The paintings executed between the episcopate of Paulos and the first half of the tenth century were largely covered during Petros I's rebuilding by a layer of plaster with entirely new representations on it. In the thirteenth century, structural modifications caused some paintings to disappear, but new partition walls inserted in various spots created space for additional murals.¹⁷ The Faras wall paintings feature two basic categories of representation. The first group, which includes depictions of various holy figures and biblical scenes, forms the liturgical-religious program of the church. The second, comprising representations of historical personages (kings, queen mothers,¹⁸ bishops), is designated the official program.¹⁹

Along with the paintings, the successive layers of plaster became the carrier of various texts in Greek, Coptic, and Old Nubian. From the technical point of

view, they can be divided into dipinti (painted) and graffiti (scratched). The technique of execution went hand in hand with the status of a text and, as a consequence, its typology: dipinti usually belonged to the original, official decoration of the church (e.g., captions to paintings, liturgical prayers, dedicatory inscriptions), and graffiti were secondary additions by the faithful in expression of private piety (e.g., visitors' signatures, private prayers, or invocations of holy beings).²⁰

Two locations outside the cathedral, but definitely forming a single complex with it, play an important role for the present study: one, a building south of the cathedral, tentatively identified as an episcopal residence, *episkopeion* (fig. 2, no. 6),²¹ and the other, the episcopal necropolis. In the northwestern corner of the former, facing the southern façade of the cathedral, were two foundation inscriptions in Greek and Coptic, both commemorating the erection of a church in 707, during the time of Bishop Paulos.²² It is commonly believed that the church in question was the cathedral itself.²³

17 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, 43–51, with figs. 1, 3, 5, 6; see also D. Zielińska, "Faras Cathedral: A Witness of Art Development in the Nubian Kingdoms of Nobadia and Makuria," *Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw* n.s. 5 = 41 (2016): 33–53.

18 According to the matrilineal inheritance system in effect during a large part of medieval Nubia's history, the throne was passed to the king's nephew (son of his sister), not to his son. Although technically the Greek title of these women is *μήτηρ βασιλέως*, "mother of the king," the term "queen mother" is used throughout this article, according to the convention in African Studies, adopted also for Nubia. The women fulfilling leadership roles in African societies, while bearing different titles specific to their own culture and language, are collectively called "queen mothers" or "queenmothers" in English literature (see T. Farar, "The Queenmother, Matriarchy, and the Question of Female Political Authority in Precolonial West African Monarchy," *Journal of Black Studies* 27.5 [1997]: 579–97). For the Nubian title and possible functions of Nubian queen mothers, see B. Rostkowska, "The Title and Office of the King's Mother in Christian Nubia," *Africana Bulletin* 31 (1982): 75–78; A. Łajtar and G. Ochala, "A Christian King in Africa: The Image of Christian Nubian Rulers in Internal and External Sources," in *The Good Christian Ruler in the First Millennium: Views from the Wider Mediterranean World in Conversation*, ed. P. M. Forness, A. Hasse-Ungeheuer, and H. Leppin, *Millennium-Studien* 92 (Berlin, 2021), 359–77.

19 For this division, see W. Godlewski, "Bishops and Kings: The Official Program of the Pachoras (Faras) Cathedrals," in *Between the Cataracts: Proceedings of the 11th Conference for Nubian Studies, Warsaw University, 27 August–2 September 2006*, ed. idem and A. Łajtar, 2 vols., *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean Suppl.* 2 (Warsaw, 2008), 1:263–82.

20 While many wall inscriptions from the cathedral have been edited, there is as yet no systematic survey of the material. The edited inscriptions are scattered throughout publications, the most important being S. Jakobielski, "Inscriptions chrétiennes," in Michalowski, *Faras* (2), 163–201; Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*; idem, "Inscriptions," in K. Michalowski, *Faras: Wall Paintings in the Collection of National Museum at Warsaw* (Warsaw, 1974), 277–309; idem, "Coptic Graffiti from Faras," *Études et travaux* 13 (1983): 134–37; Kubińska, *Inscriptions grecques*; eadem, "Prothesis de la cathédrale de Faras: Documents et recherches," *Revue des archéologues et historiens d'art de Louvain* 9 (1976): 7–37; A. Łajtar and G. Ochala, "Two Wall Inscriptions from the Faras Cathedral with Lists of People and Goods," in Łajtar, Ochala, and van der Vliet, *Nubian Voices II*, 73–102; idem, "Two Private Prayers in Wall Inscriptions in the Faras Cathedral," *Études et travaux* 30 (2017): 303–14. For a preliminary quantitative and linguistic assessment, see S. Jakobielski, "Some Remarks on Faras Inscriptions," in *Kunst und Geschichte Nubiens in christlicher Zeit: Ergebnisse und Probleme auf Grund der jüngsten Ausgrabungen*, ed. E. Dinkler (Recklinghausen, 1970), 29–38, at 29–31. With Adam Łajtar, I am presently editing the complete corpus of these texts.

21 Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 89–91.

22 Greek text: A. Łajtar and A. Twardecki, *Catalogue des inscriptions grecques du Musée national de Varsovie, Journal of Juristic Papyrology Suppl.* 2 (Warsaw, 2003), no. 101; Coptic text: J. van der Vliet, *Catalogue of the Coptic Inscriptions in the Sudan National Museum at Khartoum (I. Khartoum Copt.)*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 121 (Leuven, 2003), no. 1.

23 For a different opinion, see J. van der Vliet, "The Church of the Twelve Apostles: The Earliest Cathedral of Faras?" *Orientalia*

The bishops' necropolis was located around the cathedral in three groups of tombs, identified thanks to funerary stelae with which they were equipped, as well as a single tomb farther to the south (fig. 2, nos. 7, 8, 10, 11; see below, § "The Bishops' Tombs," for a more detailed description).

While all these elements can be analyzed separately for their cultural and historical value, there can be no doubt that the whole complex was not just the simple sum of all these parts. Instead, each element was, at least to a degree, a function of the remaining ones, and could not exist without them. Context, image, and text are entangled here in a triangle of mutual definitions: a given space in the cathedral defines the paintings and inscriptions that can be placed there and—vice versa—the paintings and inscriptions define this space's function. It is our task to disentangle this triangle, and to try to put ourselves in the shoes of medieval Nubians visiting the cathedral and understand how they would have perceived this place as a whole.

One reservation should be made here. As the cathedral complex developed over centuries and its external shape and internal layout changed, not all of its parts were visible at the same time. Chronological differentiation may therefore be important from the point of view of the memorial function of the complex, as it could reveal different focal points of memory in different periods. However, such a fine-grained analysis would require much more time and space, perhaps even a separate volume. For the purpose of this article, which is meant to signpost a new way to understanding medieval Nubian history and culture, I would like to concentrate on a general notion of *memoria Nubiana*, its mechanisms, purposes, and results, without entering into chronological considerations.

68 (1999): 84–97, where it is suggested that the inscriptions refer to the building in which they were immured. However, as shown by H. Brakmann, "*Defunctus adhuc loquitur*: Gottesdienst und Gebetsliteratur der untergegangenen Kirche in Nubien," *ALw* 48 (2006): 283–333, at 310–14, the two texts do not commemorate the *Bauabschluss* of the edifice, but the inauguration of its erection, and as such had to be placed in an already existing building in the vicinity of the construction site. For additional archaeological arguments against van der Vliet's thesis, see Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, 28, n. 2.

Objects and Modes of Commemoration in the Cathedral Complex

This section will examine different forms of memorial practices that can be found both inside and outside Faras Cathedral. The focus will be first on persons, who are easier to recognize in the material, then on events, and, finally, on the processes of shaping memory.

The Commemorating of Individuals

There are three distinct groups of people commemorated in the cathedral complex: (1) those connected with the functioning of the church—bishops and clergy; (2) those worthy of being commemorated in the cathedral, not necessarily ever having visited it—that is, kings and queen mothers; and (3) the faithful frequenting the church, both the parishioners and pilgrims. Depending on the hierarchical rank of the commemorated person, as well as on the intention and purpose of commemoration, memorial practices assume different forms transmitted in different media.

THE BISHOPS

The bishops of Faras had naturally the most elaborate commemorative program, which included their portraits painted on the cathedral walls and the epitaphs mounted on their tombs. In addition, an extraordinary wall inscription has been preserved. This inscription is unique for its historical value, as it features a list of the hierarchs of the Faras see.

The Bishops' List

No discussion of the commemorative role of Faras Cathedral can commence without analyzing this intriguing and extremely important text, which, in fact, is the only chronicle-like historical text that we have from Christian Nubia.²⁴ The inscription was painted in the niche in the eastern wall of the southern pastophorium of the cathedral, next to the figure of Christ Emmanuel (figs. 4–5). Starting with Aetios, who is believed to be the first bishop of the Faras see in the 630s, and continuing until Iesou II (1124–1196), the inscription lists as many as twenty-seven bishops, with some data concerning their episcopate.

24 Edited and annotated in Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, 190–95.

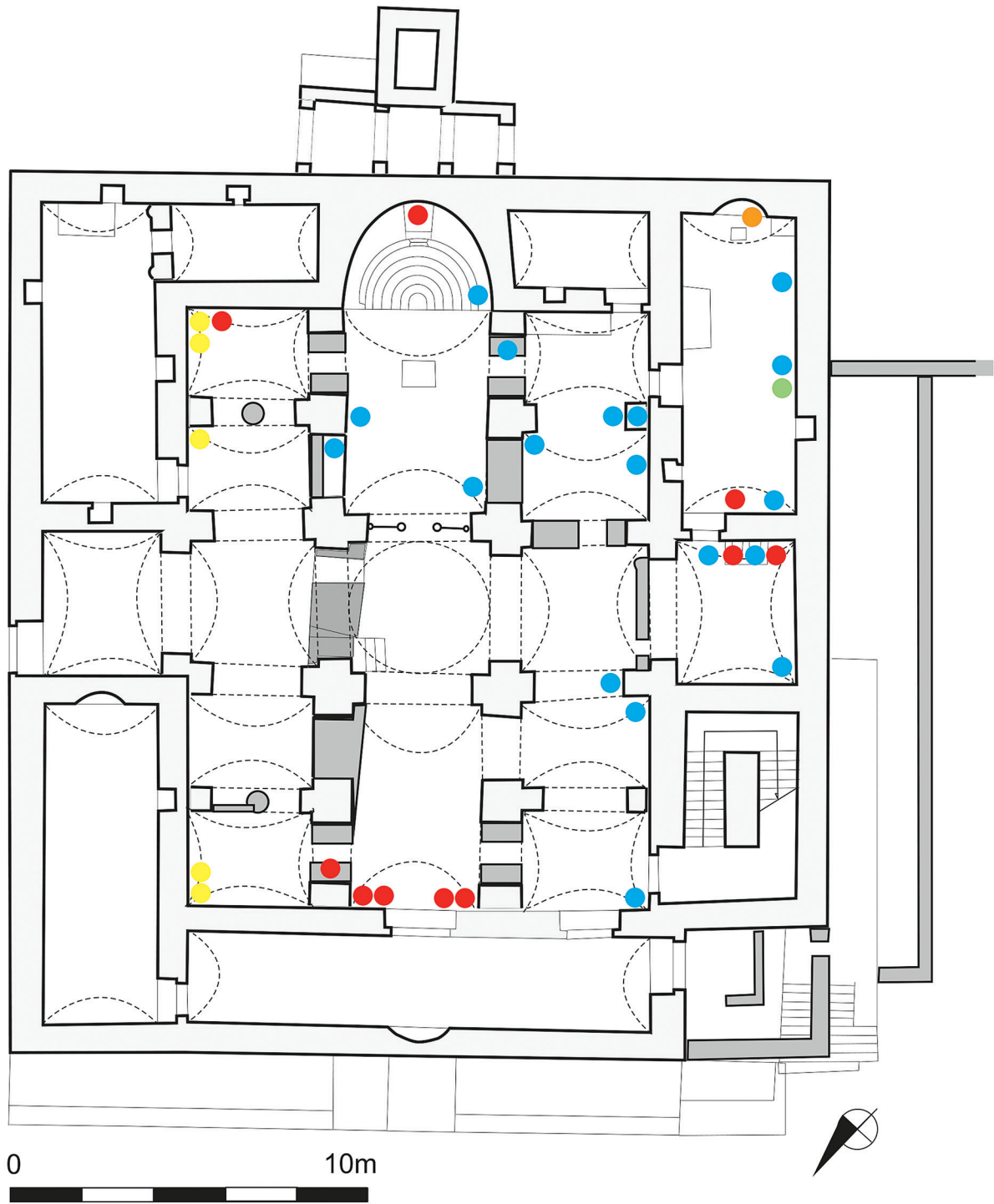


Fig. 4. Distribution of the elements of the official commemorative program: bishops' portraits (blue dots); kings' portraits (red dots); queen mothers' portraits (yellow dots); bishops' list (orange dot); kings' (?) list (green dot). Drawing by D. Zielińska, with author's additions



Fig. 5. List of Faras bishops. Photo by M. Niepokólczycki, courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw

The inscription can be translated as follows:

Aetios	[years	?			
Sarapios	[years	?			
...	[years	?			
Pilatos	[years	?			
Paulos	years	[?]			
Menas	years	[?] ¹			
Maththaios	years	36			
Ignatios	years	34			
Ioannes	years	7 (?)			
Ioannes	years	[?]			
Markos	years	12			
Chael	years	[?]			
Thomas	years	35			
Iesou	years	[?]			
Abba Kyros	years	36 (?)			
Andreas	years	1 (?)	[---]	28 (?)	
Abba Kollouthos	years	20	days (?)	14 (?)	
Abba Stephanos	in the month (?) of Epiphi, (day) 20				
Abba Elias	years	[?]	Mesore	13	he went to rest
Abba Aaron	years	20	Choiak	16	he went to rest
Abba Petros	years	25 (?)	month	Epiphi	day 26
Abba Ioannes	years	8	month	Thoth	24

Abba Merkourios, bishop of Faras, son of Abba Ioannes, bishop of Faras, years (of his life): 80, (on the) throne: 19; Epiphi 7: rest.

Abba Petros, bishop of Faras [---].

Abba Georgios, rest: Mesore 21; the days when he was sitting on the throne: 35 years.

Abba Chael, bishop of Faras and (?) son of bishop Ioseph of Timikleos (i.e., Dongola), give rest to (your, i.e., God's) servant; on Pachon 10; the days when he was sitting [on the] throne: 27 years.

Abba Iesou, bishop of Faras [---], give rest to (your, i.e., God's) servant; on Pauni 10; the days of his life on earth: 88 years, when he was sitting on the throne: 45 years.²⁵

25 The text is in Greek with occasional interjections in Coptic and Old Nubian: † | Ἀετίου [ἔτη ---] | Σαραπίου [ἔτη ---] | [...]ε... [ἔτη ---] | [Πιλ]άτου [ἔτη ---] | Πα[ύ]λου [ἔ]τη [---] | Μηναῖ [ἔτ]η .α' | Μαθθαίου ἔτη λς' | Ἰγνατίου [ἔ]τη λδ' | Ἰωάννου [ἔ]τη ζ' | Ἰωάννου [ἔ]τη [---] | Μάρκου ἔτ[η] ιβ' | Χαλῆ ἔτη [---] | Θωμᾶ [ἔ]τη λε' | Ἰησοῦ ἔτη . | ἄβ(βα) Κύρου ἔτ[η] λς' | Ἀνδρέου ἔτη ακη | ἄβ(βα) Κολούθ(ου) ἔτη κ' .ημῆ (l. ἡμέρα?) ιδ' | ἄβ(βα) Στεφάνου εμην (l. ἐν μηνί?) Ἐπίφ[η] κ' | ἄβ(βα) Ἰηλίας ἔτη .. Μεσορή ιγ' αχνητον μηνος | † ἄβ(βα) Ἀαρών ἔτη κ' Χοίακ ις' αχνητον μηνος | ἄβ(βα) Πέτρου ἔτη κς' μηνός Ἐπίφ(η) ἡμῆ(ρα) (l. ἡμέρα) κς' | ἄβ(βα) Ἰωάννου ἔτη η' μηνός Θωθ κδ' | ἄβ(βα) Μερκουρίου

ἐπισκ(όπου) Παχ(ώρας) ὑ(ιὸς) ἄβ(βα) Ἰω(άννου) ἐπισκ(όπου) Παχ(ώρας) | ἔτη π' θρόν[ο]υ ιθ' Ἐπίφ[η] ζ' ἀνάπαυ(σις) | † ἄβ(βα) Πέτρου ἐπισκ(όπου) Παχ(ώρας) [---] | ἄβ(βα) Γεωργίου ἀνάπαυσις Μεσορή κα' ἡμέρα ἐπὶ θρόν(ου) καθημένου ἔτη λε' | ἄβ(βα) Χαλῆ ἐπισκ(όπου) Παχ(ώρας) [---] (καὶ?) ὑ(ιὸς) ἐπισκ(όπου) Ἰωσήφ Τιμηκλεος τὸν δ(ούλον) ἀνάπαυσ[η] | ΠΑΧΩΝΗΑ 10 ἡμέρα τα[---] ἐπὶ θρόνου καθημένου ἔτη κζ' | ἄβ(βα) Ἰησοῦ ἐπισκ(όπου) Παχ(ώρας) [---] τὸν δ(ούλον) ἀνάπαυσον ΠΑΥΝΗΑ 10 | ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τῆς ζ[ωῆς αὐ]τοῦ ἡμέρα ἔτη πη' ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνο[υ] καθε- μένο[υ] ἔτη με' (transcr. and trans., with slight modifications, after Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, 194).

The first fifteen entries in the list (Aetios to Kyros) were written by one hand and they contain only the information on the length of the episcopate of particular diocesans. It is thus assumed that this fragment of the list was at one point copied on the wall from another unidentified source. The subsequent entries on the list, starting with Andreas (902–903), were added by different scribes.²⁶ Also starting with Andreas, the amount of information about bishops increases: from this point on, the entries give the month of death,²⁷ occasionally supplemented with statements of filiation²⁸ or age at death.²⁹

Despite its focus on the historical value of the inscription, the existing literature does not really take into consideration its function. We know nothing about medieval Nubians' approach to historiography, or even if they had any historiography at all; but it seems doubtful that the list functioned (solely) as a record of the bishopric's history (as we would understand it). Of course, the very act of arranging the bishops in chronological order and plotting the inscription in a tabular form, as well as equipping (almost) each entry with the number of years on the episcopal throne, suggests the methodical approach of a chronicler or archivist. On the other hand, the systematic adding of the day of demise, and not its year, would find little justification had this been a real chronicle or an extract thereof. To understand the main function of this text, we need to take a closer look at the context.

Originally, the southern pastophorium was a baptistery with a large baptismal font in the middle of the room.³⁰ This function was emphasized by adding on its walls the paintings of St. John the Baptist (beginning of tenth century) and St. Stephen (end of tenth century),³¹ both intrinsically connected with the sacrament of baptism. However, starting with the tenth century, changes were made to the room's adornments and furnishings, suggesting a new function. Probably during the first years of that century, the first part of the

bishops' list was written in the niche. Then, not long afterwards, the first painted representation of a bishop, perhaps Stephanos (923–926), was introduced.³² These two elements suggest that the room was no longer only a baptistery. The changes continued during the great restoration under Bishop Petros I (974–997), including the filling in of the baptismal font and the introduction of the portrait of Petros himself.³³ A portrait of another, unfortunately anonymous, bishop was added in the period between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.³⁴

The presence of the bishops' portraits and the list prompted Kazimierz Michałowski and Stefan Jakobielski to dub the pastophorium the “bishops' room” or the “hall of bishops,” but neither of them specified what this should mean in terms of the room's function.³⁵ Włodzimierz Godlewski points out that, despite the sealing of the baptismal font, the room might not have lost its primary function, because the paintings of St. John the Baptist and St. Stephen were never removed or covered by other representations. He posits that the room was also a chapel, a function that he connects to the representation of Christ Emmanuel on the east wall, beneath which an altar was installed at an unknown point. Godlewski does not expand, however, on his interpretation as to the dedication of this chapel and the character of services that could have been performed in it.³⁶

Nevertheless, it seems that all the elements fit into a coherent whole. Given the archaeological and art-historical features, it is clear that this indeed was a chapel, somehow connected with the bishops. The bishops' list, in my opinion, establishes this connection. By including the months of death, the list's entries fulfill the minimal requirement for the periodic commemoration of the deceased.³⁷ Moreover, the fact

26 Apart from the entries of Elias (926–952) and Aaron (952–972), which were written by a single person.

27 It is missing only for Petros II (1058–1062).

28 For Merkourios (1037–1056) and Chael II (1097–1124). Their fathers, too, were bishops, which is a probable reason for this detail being added to the entry.

29 For Merkourios (1037–1056) and Iesou II (1124–1169).

30 Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 66–68.

31 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, nos. 110 and 107.

32 On the south wall: *ibid.*, no. 59.

33 On the west wall: *ibid.*, no. 108; Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 106.

34 On the south wall: Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 125.

35 For example, Michałowski, *Faras*, plan at p. 74; Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, *passim*.

36 Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 115, 134.

37 See, for example, van der Vliet, “What Is Man?” 195. This is the reason why, on the one hand, the overwhelming majority of Nubian epitaphs contain only monthly and not annual dates, and, on the other, almost all epitaphs are equipped with this information (G. Ochała, *Chronological Systems of Christian Nubia, Journal of Juristic Papyrology* Suppl. 16 [Warsaw, 2011], 224).

that the names of several bishops, from Andreas to Aaron I, were retouched or written anew, to improve their legibility,³⁸ clearly suggests that the list was not a mere decorative element of the room, but was designed to be read. It formed a sort of diptych, a text that in the Christian tradition recorded the names of the living and the departed, so commemorated by the local church. This kind of text was very well known from the Eastern churches, but has not been attested in Nubia. It does not seem unreasonable, when connecting these pieces of evidence—the altar with the list next to it and the presence of bishops' portraits in the room—to characterize the southern pastophorium as a commemorative chapel of the Faras bishops, where commemorations took place on the anniversary of each bishop's death.³⁹ It is true that we have no evidence whatsoever on how such commemorations would have looked in Christian Nubia in general and at Faras in particular. Nevertheless, as the cathedral features two other evident elements connected with the commemoration of the bishops, their tombs and their painted portraits, we can try to connect the dots to form a coherent, albeit imaginary, episcopal commemorative program.

The Bishops' Tombs

The southeastern room of the cathedral would have been a central place in this program. We can easily imagine that some kind of liturgical celebration commenced there and then proceeded to the tomb of a given bishop outside the cathedral, where concluding rites would have been performed, including the recitation of the prayer of the epitaph.⁴⁰

As mentioned above, the bishops' necropolis was not confined to one spot. Three groups of tombs were found—on the southern, western, and eastern sides of the cathedral—as well as a single tomb at the northern wall of the so-called Church on the Southern Slope (fig. 2, nos. 7, 8, 10, 11).⁴¹ While the two first

groups were quite ordinary tombs with simple rectangular superstructures, the stand-alone tomb of Petros I and, especially, the eastern burial grounds were much more elaborate. Petros's tomb had a superstructure in the form of a small, roughly square, arcaded building topped with a cupola. The eastern sepulcher consisted of a row of three mortuary chapels constructed against the eastern wall of the cathedral; their walls were decorated with the paintings of the archangel Michael and the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus.⁴² Under the chapels, a single crypt was located where the bodies of five bishops were interred.⁴³

As no fencing structures have been identified in archaeological records that would have limited access to the western and southern tombs, nor traces of doors that would have blocked the entrance to the two mausolea, it is very likely that the bishops' tombs belonged to a public commemorative space.⁴⁴ They must have remained as such until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, when the whole area started to be rapidly engulfed by accumulating sand, causing most of the structures surrounding the cathedral to disappear.⁴⁵

If so, all the bishops' epitaphs appear to have been easily accessible to everyone who could read. Admittedly, however, not all of them were easy to decipher, especially those of the eastern group, which were located inside the mortuary chapel with little access to natural light. Likewise, the epitaph of Ignatios (d. 802) from the southern group was executed with a highly

belonged to Petros I (d. 999), and the eastern tombs, the latest in the necropolis, to Ioannes III (d. 1005), Petros II (d. 1062), Georgios (d. 1097), Chael II? (d. 1124), and Iesou II (d. 1169). There are also three anonymous, but undoubtedly episcopal sepulchers. In addition, the epitaph of Bishop Thomas (d. 862) was found under unknown circumstances somewhere in Faras (Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, 75–80).

42 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, nos. 123 and 124.

43 Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 139–50.

44 Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that some social norms existed that prevented laypeople from approaching the bishops' tombs, but we have no means of verifying this.

45 The depth of this sand layer is estimated at ca. 2 to 3 m. The eastern mausoleum must have been completely filled with sand in the fourteenth century, which made it possible to construct a new tomb, most probably also episcopal, on top of it (Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 119, 139–43).

38 Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, 190.

39 The bishops mentioned in the list without any death date, in particular those in the first part of the text, were probably commemorated collectively on a day devoted to the general commemoration of bishops.

40 See van der Vliet, "What Is Man?," with further references.

41 Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 139–50. The southern tombs are the earliest; they belonged to Maththaios (d. 766) and Ignatios (d. 802). The western ones were constructed in the tenth century for Kollouthos (d. 923), Stephanos (d. 926), and Aaron I (d. 972). The single tomb

Fig. 6.
Epitaph of Bishop
Ignatios, d. 802.
National Museum,
Warsaw, inv. 234647
MNW. Photo public
domain, courtesy of the
National Museum,
Warsaw ([https://
cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/
en/catalog/618613](https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/618613))



elaborate and ligatured type of script, undoubtedly barely legible even for highly skilled readers (fig. 6).⁴⁶

46 This is the clearest case of the iconicity of script from Faras Cathedral, in which the message was purposefully concealed for the sake of the visual effect, investing the inscription with an arcane, magic-like character. Its existence supports the hypothesis that during the commemorative rites, the epitaphs were not read directly from the stelae. Instead, a kind of scrapbook might have been used, or, more probably, the texts were recited from memory, as the theory of orality for antiquity and the Middle Ages assumes; see, for example, R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1992), 91–92; P. Saenger, “Books of Hours and the Reading Habits of the Later Middle Ages,” in *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, ed. R. Chartier, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Princeton, 1989), 141–73; Papalexandrou, “Text in Context,” 261–64.

The universal memorial functions of epitaphs have already been sufficiently discussed elsewhere.⁴⁷ Here I would like to focus on one particular element featuring in all the tombstones of the Faras bishops, namely, biographical data about the deceased.⁴⁸ These biographical sections mostly provide only the age at death and the length of the episcopate, presented very succinctly (“he sat on the throne X years; the years of his

47 For instance, Treffort, *Mémoires carolingiennes*; Mathieu, *L’épître et la mémoire*; van der Vliet, “What Is Man?”

48 Such biographical sections can be found in the epitaphs of other high-ranking persons in Nubia as well.

life were Y").⁴⁹ However, in two cases, they assume a narrative form. The epitaph of Ignatios reads: "Having accomplished his episcopal function in beautiful and God-pleasing liturgical services, in a manner befitting (his) priestly (function) and (episcopal) seat, he took rest, having lived from his birth until his end 78 years, in the struggles of the monastic life 58 years, in the episcopal function 36 years."⁵⁰ And the epitaph of Thomas summarizes the bishop's career in the following manner: "First, in his life, he did well in monastic life in the famous monastery called Maurage—23 years—and he was its archimandrite. Then, by the decree of God and by the will of the kings, he was summoned to the throne of high priesthood, that is, the episcopal rank of the bishopric of the glorious city of Faras."⁵¹

In general, the texts of Christian epitaphs can be divided into two parts: a prayer (invocation, acclamation, request), directed to God and intended to ensure salvation for the deceased, and a "practical" part (name and date, title, and function), treated as guidelines for the living so as to ensure a proper commemoration or to emphasize the status and deeds of the deceased. Age formulae should also be classified in the latter part, but they do not seem to have played any particular role in the commemoration. The two narrative passages should be treated as *résumés* of the bishops' lives, presenting them as pious men and their careers as an example of a saintly life; in this form, the inscriptions could address both their flock, presenting them as role models, and God, invoking their merits so that he receives them in his kingdom. The function of the laconic age formula is harder to define: unless it is a statement of extraordinary

longevity of the deceased,⁵² why should the length of life and episcopate be a valid piece of information? On the one hand, their inclusion might have resulted from the historical awareness of the scribes/redactors, who realized that such data may be useful for compiling later sources, as the bishops' list. On the other hand, it is possible that the phrases served as "cues" that triggered a recitation of the bishop's vita, analogous to those written for Ignatios and Thomas, memorized by the celebrant.⁵³

The Bishops' Portraits

Before reaching the necropolis, our commemorative procession might have stopped in front of the commemorated bishop's portrait; indeed, many of these portraits were located in or right next to the bishops' chapel (fig. 4).⁵⁴ Eighteen paintings in the cathedral have been identified (some with a degree of reservation) as depicting the Faras diocesans. They date from the time of Kyros (late 860s)—or perhaps slightly earlier, from the episcopate of Iesou I (early 860s)—until possibly as late as Aaron II (turn of the eleventh century). Representations that have been identified with certainty, thanks to the occurrence of captions, are those depicting Kyros (866–902),⁵⁵ Petros I (974–999),⁵⁶

49 Cf. the entries of Merkourios and Iesou II in the list of bishops above.

50 Lines 6–11: τὴν ἐαυτοῦ ἀρχιερατικὴν(ν) τάξιν ἐν καλαῖς (καὶ) θεαρέστ(οις) λειτουργικ(α)ῖς | λατρείας ἱεροπρεπῶς (καὶ) θακοπρεπῶς (καὶ) καλὴν | ἀνάπαυαν ἔσχεν. ζήσας ἀπὸ γεννήσεως αὐτοῦ ἕως | τελευτ(ῆς) ἔτη σθ', ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἀγῶσιν τῆς μοναδικῆς νη', | ἐν δὲ τῇ τάξει τῆς ἀρχιεροσύνης(ς) λς' (transcr. after Łajtar and Twardcki, *Catalogue*, 280–81; my translation).

51 Lines 5–13: παῖ ἡωρῶπῃ μεν γῆ περβιος ἀφρασε καλως ντηῖτῃνοαχος γῆ πνονας:τηριον ετ' σοετ ἔετῃ κῆ' παῖ ετογνογτε εἶροφ δε ναγραγν αγω ἀφ' ἀρχ(ι)μανδ(ρι)τ(ης) | εἰχων: μῆνῃσας δε ριτῆ πεφγςμα | ἡπνογτε νῆ πογωφ ἡνερρωγ αχτωρῆ ἡνοφ εχῆ πεθρονος ντηῖτῃαρχιερουσνῃν ετε παθνος ἔπε' ἡτηῖτῃεπισκο(πος) | ἡτεπισκοπῃ ἡλμῃπροπολεως παχωρας (transcr. after M. R. M. Hasitzka, *Koptisches Sammelbuch I* [Vienna 1993], no. 719; my translation).

52 This was apparently the case for deacon Georgios from the monastery at Ghazali, who died at the age of 100; A. Łajtar, *Catalogue of the Greek Inscriptions in the Sudan National Museum at Khartoum (I. Khartoum Greek)*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 122 (Leuven, 2003), no. 33.

53 For the use of the term "cue" in the framework of memory studies, see Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 126–31.

54 We do not know what the commemoration of the portrait would have looked like; it did not involve the burning of oil lamps in front of the paintings apparently, as no traces of soot were found on the lower half of the paintings (with the exception of Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 20, but its identification as a bishop is uncertain), which was common with representations belonging to the liturgical program (e.g., *ibid.*, nos. 63 [Archangel Michael], 70 [nativity], 72 [Holy Trinity]).

55 *Ibid.*, no. 45. The legend reads ὁ θεοτ(μ[ος]) | π(ατῆ)ρ ἡμῶν | ἐπίσκοπος μητροπ[όλ(εως)] | ἁββα Κύρου, "Our God-honoring father, Abba Kyros, bishop of the metropolis" (transcr. after *ibid.*, 193; my translation).

56 *Ibid.*, no. 108. The legend reads [ἁ]ββα Πέτρου ἐπισκ[ό]που (καὶ) μ(η)τροπολ(ι)τ(η)ς (Ι. ἐπισκόπου μητροπόλεως?) Παχώρας, | πολ(λ)ὰ τὰ ἔτη, "Abba Petros, bishop of the metropolis of Faras, many years (to him)" (transcr. after *ibid.*, 339; my translation).



Fig. 7. Portrait of Bishop Petros under protection of the apostle Peter. National Museum, Warsaw, inv. 234031. Photo public domain, courtesy of the National Museum, Warsaw (<https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/617977>)

Marianos (1005–1036),⁵⁷ and Georgios (1062–1097).⁵⁸ The remaining ones have been attributed on stylistic grounds to other prelates.⁵⁹ Sometimes, especially in the earlier paintings, the bishops are represented on their own,⁶⁰ but most of the time they are depicted under the protection of the Virgin Mary, Christ, and—in one case—St. Peter (fig. 7).⁶¹ The bishops were always portrayed holding a codex in the left hand and wearing typical episcopal attire, which, however, was individualized per person.⁶²

It is assumed that the bishops' portraits were executed at the beginning of their episcopates.⁶³ Hence, their primary function was certainly not commemorative in the sense discussed here. By putting the bishops under the protection of various holy figures, they served, first and foremost, to obtain blessings and assure

57 Ibid., no. 95. There are two legends identifying the bishop, and the one located to the left of the painting is better preserved; it reads ἄββα Μαρριανού | ἐπισκόπου Παχ(ώ)ρας | ὁρθό[δ]οξος καὶ εὐ(σε)|βέ-σ[τατο]ς, πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη, “Abba Marianos, bishop of Faras, orthodox and most pious, many years (to him)” (transcr. after *ibid.*, 309; my own translation).

58 Ibid., no. 128. The caption reads ἄββα Γεωργίου | ὁρθ(ό)δωξος (l. ὁρθόδοξος) ἐπίσκοπος (l. ἐπίσκοπος) | Παχώρας, πολλὰ τὰ | [ἐ]τη, “Abba Georgios, orthodox bishop of Faras, many years (to him)” (transcr. after *ibid.*, 390; my translation).

59 Ibid., nos. 42 (Iesou I?), 50A (Koullouthos?), 59 (Stephanos), 61 (Ioannes III), 125 (Merkourios), 127 (Petros II?), 134 (Chael II or Iesou II?), 148 (Aaron II?); for the following murals no identification could be proposed: nos. 20, 34, 40, 100, 150, 151.

60 Ibid., nos. 20 (unidentified?), 40 (unidentified), 42 (Iesou II?), 45 (Kyros), 50A (Kollouthos?), 100 (unidentified?).

61 Ibid., nos. 34 (unidentified, Christ or Mary?), 59 (Stephanos?, Mary), 61 (Ioannes III, unidentified), 95 (Marianos, Mary with the child Jesus), 108 (Petros I, St. Peter), 125 (unidentified, Mary with the child Jesus), 127 (Petros II, unidentified), 128 (Georgios, Christ and Mary), 134 (unidentified, Christ), 148 (unidentified, Christ and Mary), 150 (unidentified, archangel), 151 (unidentified, unidentified). On the typology of Nubian protection scenes, see S. Jakobielski, “Nubian Scenes of Protection from Faras as an Aid to Dating,” *Études et travaux* 21 (2007): 44–50, and Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, 38–39.

62 K. C. Innemée, *Ecclesiastical Dress in the Medieval Near East*, Studies in Textile and Costume History 1 (Leiden, 1992); see also the comparative table in Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, fig. 10.

63 That this was indeed the occasion, and not, for instance, upon the death of a bishop, is indicated by the acclamation πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη in the legends to the portraits (see above, nn. 56–58). While there could have been other events during bishops' lifetimes that would be suitable for such a souvenir with wishes of long life, the enthronement seems to be the most natural moment for that. The same argument can be made for the royal portraits (see below, § “The Kings and Queen Mothers”).

“perpetual prayers of intercession,”⁶⁴ which were especially important at the commencement of the episcopate. The portraits (not only the episcopal ones) had more earthly functions as well: they apparently served political and ideological purposes,⁶⁵ while also informing the beholders about the social status of the depicted persons (the choice of attributes and garments) and their personal and institutional orthodoxy and piety.⁶⁶

With the passing of a bishop, the supplicatory function of his portrait did not cease: the painting, or more precisely the patron saint depicted in it, kept praying for the afterlife bliss and salvation of the represented person, as an epitaph would do. Similarly, the painting’s commemorative value did not fade; quite the contrary, it was only strengthened. By preserving the memory of the physical appearance of the bishops,⁶⁷ it supplemented and enhanced the purely verbal commemoration of the liturgical rites with a more tangible witness of the bishop’s life. Regardless of whether this was intentional or not, those murals became an illustrated history of the bishopric of Faras, not only for us, but undoubtedly also for the medieval Nubians.⁶⁸

64 B. Mierzejewska, “*Intercessio Perpetua*: The Nubians and Their Heavenly Allies in Painting,” in Godlewski and Łajtar, *Between the Cataracts*, 2:654–74, at 654.

65 Godlewski (“Bishops and Kings,” 266) is correct in classifying these paintings with the portraits of kings and queen mothers as the official program of the cathedral, which was meant to express the concept of “the divine origins of the power of Makurian kings.” However, he does not explain how the portraits of bishops exactly fit into this concept, apart from a general statement that successive diocesans were responsible for adding subsequent images to this program.

66 Mierzejewska, “*Intercessio Perpetua*,” 654.

67 This is not to say that Nubian murals were real-life portraits of Nubian dignitaries. Note, however, that while most were depicted with a dark complexion—in contrast with holy figures, whose faces are always white (figs. 7, 8)—in two cases the color is markedly different. Bishop Marianos’s skin is “olive-yellow” (Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 95) and the face of the anonymous queen mother protected by Michael is as white as that of the archangel (ibid., no. 39). There have been attempts to assign on this basis a non-Nubian origin to these two figures (for Marianos, ibid., 312–13, with a summary of discussions of this issue; for the queen mother, W. Godlewski, “Introduction to the Golden Age of Makuria [9th–11th Centuries],” *Africana Bulletin* 50 [2002]: 75–98, at 83), but without any written sources confirming this, they are unverifiable. Nevertheless, these differences do not seem meaningless and may indeed signal, in a schematic or symbolic manner, some special features of these persons’ outer appearance.

68 While almost all episcopal portraits from the eighth to the beginning of the tenth century disappeared after the rebuilding

THE KINGS AND QUEEN MOTHERS

While the bishops had the most elaborate commemorative program, reflecting their elevated status on a local level, and undoubtedly connected with the presence of their earthly remains in the complex, they were certainly not the most important persons whose memory was celebrated in the church. The painted representations of Nubian kings and queen mothers formed the essence of the official iconographic program of the cathedral. Altogether, ten possible portraits of kings and five of queen mothers have been identified in the cathedral (fig. 4).⁶⁹ Regrettably, only three of the depicted persons can be firmly identified thanks to inscriptions accompanying the murals.⁷⁰ These are King Georgios (before 969–end of tenth century),⁷¹ King Mouses Georgios (1155–between 1190 and 1198),⁷²

and redecoration of the cathedral in the time of Petros (apart from Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 59), those added from the middle of the tenth century were visible until the cathedral’s abandonment (with the exception of ibid., no. 128).

69 I follow here the identifications proposed in ibid. Godlewski, “Bishops and Kings,” assumed different identification criteria for his study; his list includes as many as fifteen Nubian kings and six queen mothers (see especially his fig. 1) and only partly overlaps with that of Jakobielski: he omitted some of Jakobielski’s identifications (nos. 33, 50, 66, 68) and included depictions of other male figures, whom Jakobielski styles more cautiously as dignitaries (nos. 132, 135, 136, 138, 140, 143, 144, 150). Godlewski also contends that the person depicted in Jakobielski’s no. 142 is not King Mouses Georgios, as is commonly believed, but an anonymous queen mother (see also below, n. 72). I do not engage here in this discussion, as it goes well beyond the scope of this paper, and I follow the common opinion.

70 For the unidentified kings, Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, nos. 33, 43 (Georgios I?), 49, 50, 55 (Raphael or his successor?), 67, 68, 69. For the unidentified queen mothers, ibid., nos. 39, 48, 84, 130.

71 Ibid., no. 109. The legend reads Γεωργίου | βασιλ(εύ)ς, πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη, | υ(ι)ὸς Ζαχα(ρι)ου βασιλ(έω)ς, “King Georgios, many years (to him), son of King Zacharias” (transcr., slightly modified, after ibid., 343; my translation). Jakobielski labels him Georgios II, following U. Monneret de Villard, *Storia della Nubia cristiana*, OCA 118 (Rome, 1938), 223, cf. 123–28; S. C. Munro-Hay, “Kings and Kingdoms of Ancient Nubia,” *Rassegna di studi etiopici* 29 (1982–83): 87–137, at 107–8; and Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, 89–92, 260. For Godlewski, “Introduction to the Golden Age of Makuria,” 90–91, he is the third ruler by that name. According to my calculation, he should be numbered Georgios IV.

72 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 142. The mural does not feature a typical caption, but an inscription painted immediately to the right of the figure’s head clearly identifies him as the ruler. Its two first lines read, in Greek and Old Nubian, οὗτός ἐστιν ἀδ(α)γεᾶ βασιλ(εύ)ς | Μωυσηῖς Γεωργίου, “This is the sweet king Mouses Georgios” (transcr. after A. Łajtar, “Varia Nubica XII–XIX,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology*

and Queen Mother Martha (the beginning of the eleventh century).⁷³ The portraits were located in different areas inside the building, but a general rule was that the kings were placed in its southern part and the queen mothers in the northern one, possibly reflecting the division of the naos into male and female parts.⁷⁴ One also notes the presence of two or possibly three royal representations in and close to the southern pastophorium, a point to which I will return. Similarly to bishops, the royal personages are represented with specific royal attributes and in specific royal attire;⁷⁵ either as self-standing figures⁷⁶ or, less often, under protection of holy entities. In the latter case, the usual protector is the Virgin Mary with the child Jesus (fig. 8);⁷⁷ only in the case of two unidentified queen mothers do we find other figures: St. Aaron⁷⁸ and the archangel Michael.⁷⁹

39 [2009]: 83–119, at 91; my translation). Godlewski (“Bishops and Kings,” esp. 278) contends that the figure represents an unidentified queen mother; see above, n. 69.

73 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 71. The caption reads Μάρθα μή(τη)ρ βασιλ(έω)ς, | πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη, “Queen Mother Martha, many years (to her)” (transcr. after *ibid.*, 249; my translation). She could be the mother of either Georgios IV (Godlewski, “Introduction to the Golden Age of Makuria,” 90–91 [= Georgios III]) or his successor, Raphael (Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, 253).

74 On this division, see A. Sulikowska-Belczkowska, “Kobiety program ikonograficzny nawy północnej katedry w Faras / Female Iconography in the Northern Aisle of Faras Cathedral,” *Journal of the National Museum in Warsaw*, n.s., 5 (2016): 96–129.

75 See, for example, M. Woźniak, “Royal Iconography: Contribution to the Study of Costume,” in *The Fourth Cataract and Beyond: Proceedings of the 12th International Conference for Nubian Studies*, ed. J. R. Anderson and D. A. Welsby, British Museum Publications on Egypt and Sudan 1 (Leuven, 2014), 929–41.

76 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, nos. 33 (unidentified king?), 43 (Georgios I?), 50 (unidentified king?), 66 (Raphael or his successor?), 67 (unidentified king), 68 (unidentified king?), 69 (unidentified king?), 84 (unidentified queen mother?).

77 *Ibid.*, nos. 49 (unidentified king?), 109 (Georgios, son of Zacharias), 71 (Martha), 130 (unidentified queen mother?).

78 *Ibid.*, no. 48. The saint is identified by the caption [δ] ἄγιος [Ἀα]ρών, “Saint Aaron,” but it is unknown which Aaron is meant—the biblical brother of Moses; an anchorite from the First Cataract region venerated as a saint in Nubia (see A. Łukaszewicz, “En marge d’une image de l’anachorète Aaron dans la cathédrale de Faras,” *Nubia Christiana* 1 [1982]: 192–213); or another holy figure by this name. However, even if the identity of the saint could be established, the reason for choosing him as a protector eludes us.

79 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 39. The cult of archangels, especially Michael, was extremely popular in Nubia, to which attest countless invocations of their names in all types of inscriptions and magical texts. For their protective role, see M. Łaptaś, “Archangels

As with the Faras diocesans, the royal portraits seem to have been executed shortly after the enthronement of the new ruler.⁸⁰ If indeed so, their primary function and message would then be essentially the same as that of the bishops’ portraits: to ensure the divine protection and blessing for the new king and queen mother. Here, however, the ideological load definitely weighs heavier: especially in the protection scenes with Mary, the portraits underscore the divine origin of royal authority in Nubia, and thus legitimize it.⁸¹ For queen mothers, the Virgin’s protection had an additional, quite special meaning, since it drew a line between them, showing that, like Mary, the mother of Christ, the queen mother was the mother of a future Makurian ruler, Christ’s deputy on earth.⁸²

Setting aside the ideology, these paintings also had a practical, down-to-earth dimension. For much of the Christian Nubian population, the murals were probably the closest they could ever get to the royal family: to see who their current rulers were, what they looked like, what they wore.⁸³ In this way, the Nubian royal portraiture realizes the alliance between authority and

as Protectors and Guardians in Nubian Painting,” in Godlewski and Łajtar, *Between the Cataracts*, 2:675–81, and, more generally, eadem, “The Position of Archangel Michael within the Celestial Hierarchy: Some Aspects of the Manifestation of His Cult in Nubian Painting,” in *The Archangel Michael in Africa: History, Cult, and Persona*, ed. I. S. Gilhus, A. Tsakos, and M. C. Wright (London, 2019), 95–107.

80 See above, n. 63. This may be also reflected in the painting of Georgios, son of Zacharias, in which Mary offers the king a scepter and Christ touches his crown (Godlewski, “Bishops and Kings,” 265). The coronation rite is possibly also mirrored in the use of the epithet “crowned by God” (Gr. Θεόστεπτος, Copt. πενταπνοῦτε στεφανοῦ ἡμοῦ) in the Makurian kings’ titulature (Łajtar and Ochała, “Christian King in Africa,” 367–68).

81 B. Mierzejewska, “Murals in the Bishops’ Chapel, Faras: The Visual Expression of the Ruler’s Ideology in Nubia,” in *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit: Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20.–26. Juli 1996*, vol. 1, *Materielle Kultur, Kunst und religiöses Leben*, ed. S. Emmel et al., Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients 6 (Wiesbaden, 1999), 285–95. She traces this ideology and the methods of its visual expression to Byzantium.

82 D. Zielińska, “The Iconography of Power—the Power of Iconography: The Nubian Royal Ideology and Its Expression in Wall Painting,” in Anderson and Welsby, *Fourth Cataract and Beyond*, 943–49.

83 See above, n. 67. Naturally, without any written sources describing the movement of the faithful in Nubian churches, we cannot be absolutely certain whether everyone had free access to all places at all times. However, judging by the distribution of inscriptions left by individuals on the cathedral’s walls (cf. fig. 11), we can quite safely



Fig. 8.
Portrait of Queen Mother
Martha under protection of
Mary with the child Jesus.
Photo by T. Jakobielski,
courtesy of the Polish Centre
of Mediterranean Archaeology
of the University of Warsaw

memory. Within the framework of Assmann's theory, it combines the retrospective ("power requires origin") and prospective ("rulers . . . want to be remembered") aspects of any memorial act.⁸⁴

assume that, apart from the sanctuary, there were no particular restrictions in this respect.

84 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 53–54.

When the king or queen mother passed away, their portraits naturally became objects of commemoration, as were those of the bishops. It may not be insignificant that depictions of several kings were located in and around the southern pastophorium. In the center of the southern wall of this room an inscription was discovered, regrettably badly faded, with a list of as

Table 1. Kings of Makuria in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries

Faras List	Fasti of Makurian Kings ¹
line 28: Zacharias	Zacharias I (?–856, 859, or 866)
line 29: Ioannes	Georgios I (856, 859, or 866–ca. 887)
line 30: Georgios	Georgios II (ca. 887–915/16 or 916/17)
line 31: Zacharias	Zacharias II (915/16 or 916/17–after 940/1)
line 32: Georgios	Georgios III (after 940/1–961/2 or 962/3)
line 33: Zacharias	Zacharias III (961/2 or 962/3–before 969)

¹ My numbering of the kings diverges at certain places from what can be found in previous literature, e.g., Welsby, *Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia*, 260, or Godlewski, “Bishops and Kings,” 277; see above, n. 69.

many as thirty-six names.⁸⁵ The text was laid out in five columns, identical to the first part of the bishops’ inscription in the same room. The first column contained the name, the second the Greek word for “years,” and the third a numeral, undoubtedly designating the number of years. The fourth and fifth columns were obliterated beyond recognition, but on the basis of the bishops’ list, it is not unreasonable to assume that they contained the month and a numeral, most probably the person’s death date. Thus, the function of the list must have been identical with the function of the bishops’ list, that is, a record of the days of commemoration of the listed persons. This is further supported by the fact that the list, like the bishops’ inscription, appears to have been constantly updated: its first part (lines 1–26) was executed in a single hand, the rest by different scribes.

We are certainly dealing here with a list of officials, but with the exception of the last entry, none of the names is supplied with any additional designation. The last entry belongs to a certain Ioannes, who is labeled “eparch,” one of the highest official functions in the kingdom.⁸⁶ It therefore cannot be ruled out that

this was the list of eparchs. However, as the fasti of Nubian eparchs are full of lacunae, such a hypothesis is completely unverifiable.⁸⁷ On the other hand, as has already been observed by Jakobielski in his edition of the text, the order of names in certain rows surprisingly coincides with the names of the kings of Makuria between the seventh and beginning of the eleventh centuries. Here the sequence in lines 28–33 is especially striking, almost perfectly matching the rulers between the mid-ninth and end of the tenth centuries (table 1).⁸⁸

It is therefore extremely tempting to see in this inscription a record of the Makurian kings up to the mid-eleventh century, in which case, the occurrence of eparch Ioannes as the last one on the list should perhaps be interpreted as a kind of subscript.⁸⁹ If this interpretation is credible, the southern pastophorium could be perceived as a commemorative chapel of not only the bishops of Faras, but also of the Nubian kings. This would also explain the occurrence of royal portraits in that space.

⁸⁵ Edited and commented in Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, 195–98. The inscription is too poorly preserved to provide its full transcription and translation here.

⁸⁶ There were different categories of eparchs, probably related to the administrative division of the kingdom. The most commonly attested is “eparch of Nobadia,” in charge of the whole northern region. Single examples exist of “eparch of Palagi,” “eparch of Gadera (?),” “vice-eparch of Terpekkil,” but the location of these apparent toponyms is unknown; in addition, many persons are styled simply as eparchs without an additional qualifier. For Nubian eparchs in general, see

B. C. Hendrickx, “The ‘Lord of the Mountain’: A Study of the Nubian eparchos of Nobadia,” *Le Muséon* 124, 3–4 (2011): 303–55, but the article needs a thorough revision and update.

⁸⁷ See the lists compiled by Hendrickx, “Lord of the Mountain,” 350–55; and G. R. Ruffini at http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/Eparchs_of_Nobadia (accessed 20 December 2021).

⁸⁸ Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, 197.

⁸⁹ The date of the execution of the inscription is unfortunately unknown; the context provides only a terminus post quem in the first half of the tenth century, when this layer was plastered on the wall.

(EXTRA)ORDINARY CITIZENS

The bishops and members of the royal family were not the only ones to have access to the cathedral's memorial function. The sacred space provided several commemorative opportunities to other citizens as well, depending on what they could offer.

The affluent could contribute a wall painting to the cathedral. In such cases, an appropriate inscription was painted next to the image. These dipinti have a very characteristic and stable structure. They consist of a prayer addressed to Jesus and the holy figure depicted in the founded mural, composed of a series of supplicatory imperatives ("guard, bless, protect, strengthen, help," etc.) and the presentation of the donor.⁹⁰ Nine of these inscriptions have been identified in the cathedral; they are concentrated in the northern nave, especially its western part (figs. 9–10).⁹¹

We do not know how the donation procedure was organized. On the one hand, the chronological proximity of all the donated paintings (early eleventh century, not long after the rebuilding of the church), the involvement in their founding of the clerics serving in the cathedral,⁹² and the presence among the founded images of the portrait of Queen Mother Martha, belonging to the official

iconographic program, suggest that this may have been an institutionalized enterprise. On the other hand, the fact that two sets of two almost identical murals were donated, each placed in immediate proximity of the other,⁹³ and that the donors' activity was limited only to the north nave indicate that this part of the interior may have functioned as a display of personal piety.

The primary function of these texts was to pray for the donors *in absentia* and their direct addressees were the holy persons depicted in the accompanying paintings, and through them the Godhead.⁹⁴ From a purely human angle, however, they should be seen as a means to immortalize the memory of the donors. After all, they were persons whose social and economic standing allowed them to finance exquisite works of art in the most important building in the area, where everyone could see them. They were thus executed not only *ad maiorem Dei gloriam inque hominum salutem*, but also as an expression of the human need to outlive one's own lifetime.

Wall paintings were not the only contribution to the church for which one deserved to be commemorated. Two wall inscriptions discovered on the walls of the cathedral, if correctly interpreted, contained lists of donors of bread and other foodstuffs for the needs of the congregation.⁹⁵ They list altogether thirty-five persons, who must have formed only a small part of the entire community—perhaps its most prominent members or representatives of local families. While we can safely assume that bringing gifts was a normal practice in Nubia, as it was in other Eastern churches,⁹⁶ recording this fact in written form was apparently not.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, we cannot say what made these

90 A typical example reads: [Κ(ύρι)ε] Ἰ(ησο)ῦ Χ(ριστο)ῦ (I. Χριστέ), Μαρία φύλαξων (I. φύλαξον), | εὐλόγησον, [σκη]έπασον, ἐνδυνάμισον (I. ἐνδυνάμωσον), βοήθεισον (I. βοήθησον) τοῦ δοῦλου σου (I. τὴν δούλην σου) μαριανη τωρε μαριατα. | εφεωρε ραμνη, "Lord Jesus Christ (and) Mary, guard, bless, protect, strengthen, help your servant Mariami, daughter of Mariate. So be it, amen." (transcr. and trans. after Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, 275; see fig. 10). Apart from Faras, such inscriptions are known from Abdallah-n Irqi, Abd al-Qadir, Dongola, and Baganarti; for a general characteristic, see W. Godlewski, U. Kusz, and A. Łajtar, "A Fragmentary Wooden Icon from the Church of Archangel Raphael (SWN.B.V)," in *Dongola 2015–2016: Fieldwork, Conservation and Site Management*, ed. W. Godlewski, D. Dzierzbicka, and A. Łajtar, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology Excavation Series 5 (Warsaw, 2018), 147–54, at 152–53.

91 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, nos. 63 (unidentified), 71 (Mariakouda, priest of the Church of Mary), 72 and 78 (two dedications by the same person, Staurosinkouda, deacon of the Church of Mary), 74 (unidentified), 76 (Paimi, daughter of Anna), 77 (unidentified daughter of Mar[]), 78 (Marteri, daughter of Isousinta), 80 (double dedication by Ioseph, deacon of the Church of Mary, and Mariami, daughter of Mariata [see previous note and fig. 10]).

92 See the preceding note. They are all styled as serving at μαρια παχωρας, "(the Church of) Mary at Pachoras," a designation that has convincingly been identified with the cathedral (Jakobielski, *History of the Bishopric of Pachoras*, 176–78, 180; van der Vliet, "Church of the Twelve Apostles," 91, n. 42).

93 Two paintings of the enthroned nursing Virgin Mary (Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, nos. 74 and 80) and two representations of *Maestas crucis* (ibid., nos. 76 and 77).

94 For analysis of Byzantine donor portraits as a contact zone between the suppliant and God, see R. Franes, *Donor Portraits in Byzantine Art: The Vicissitudes of Contact between Human and Divine* (Cambridge, 2018).

95 Łajtar and Ochala, "Two Wall Inscriptions," 87–102.

96 Thus, the first part of the so-called (*Pseudo*-)Nicene Canons in Old Nubian (BM Or. MS 6805, fols. 19–22), is devoted to food offerings to the church (edition in G. M. Browne, "Griffith's 'Nicene Canons,'" *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 20, 3–4 [1983]: 97–112).

97 Apart from the two Faras inscriptions, there is another one from the church at Sonqi Tino (see G. Ochala, "Old Nubian Lists of Goods

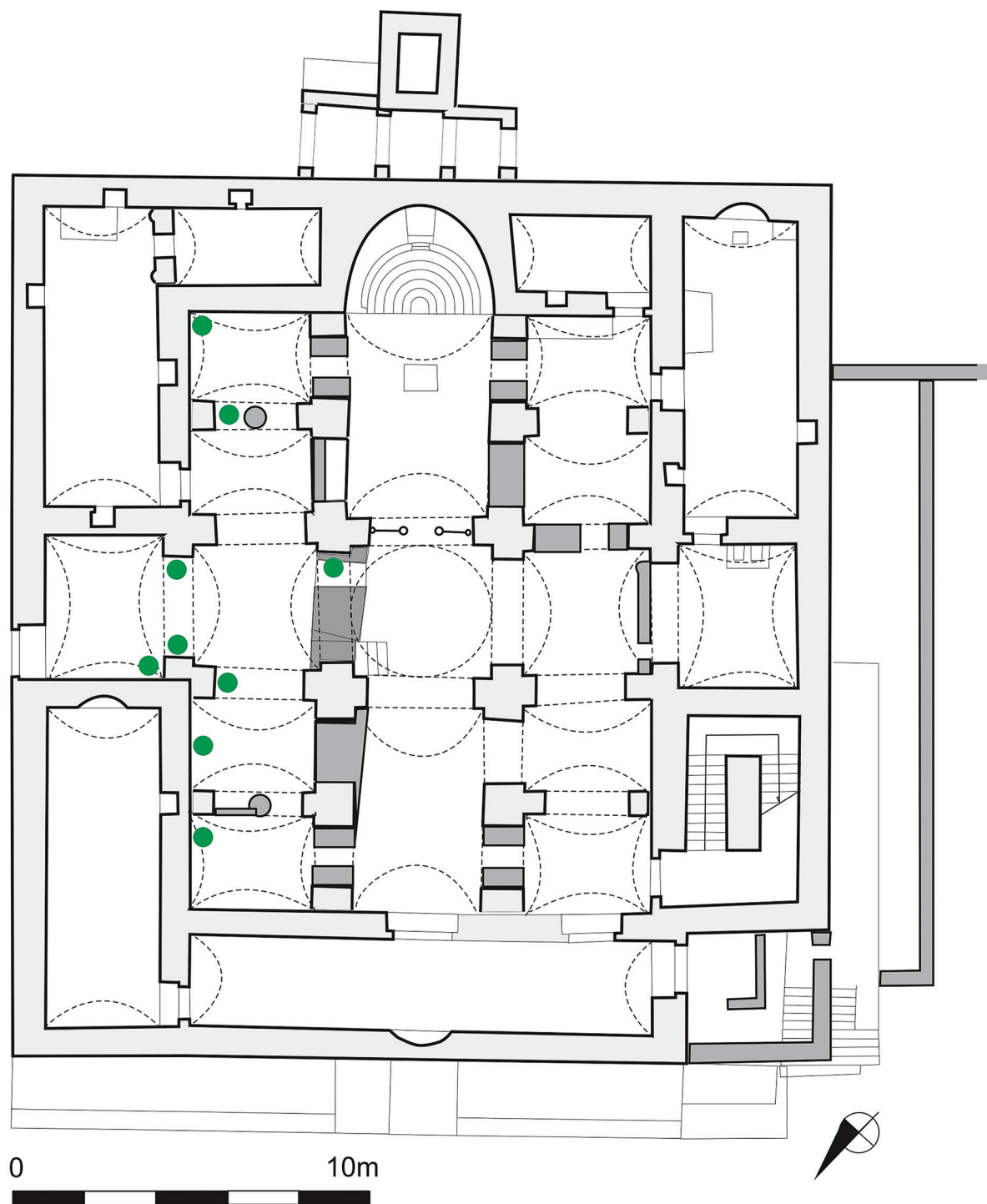


Fig. 9. Distribution of dedicatory inscriptions in the cathedral. Drawing by D. Zielińska, with author's additions



Fig. 10. Painting of an enthroned Mary, with the child Jesus, with two dedicatory inscriptions of Ioseph and Mariami. National Museum, Warsaw, inv. 234021. Photo public domain, courtesy of the National Museum, Warsaw (<https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/617967>)

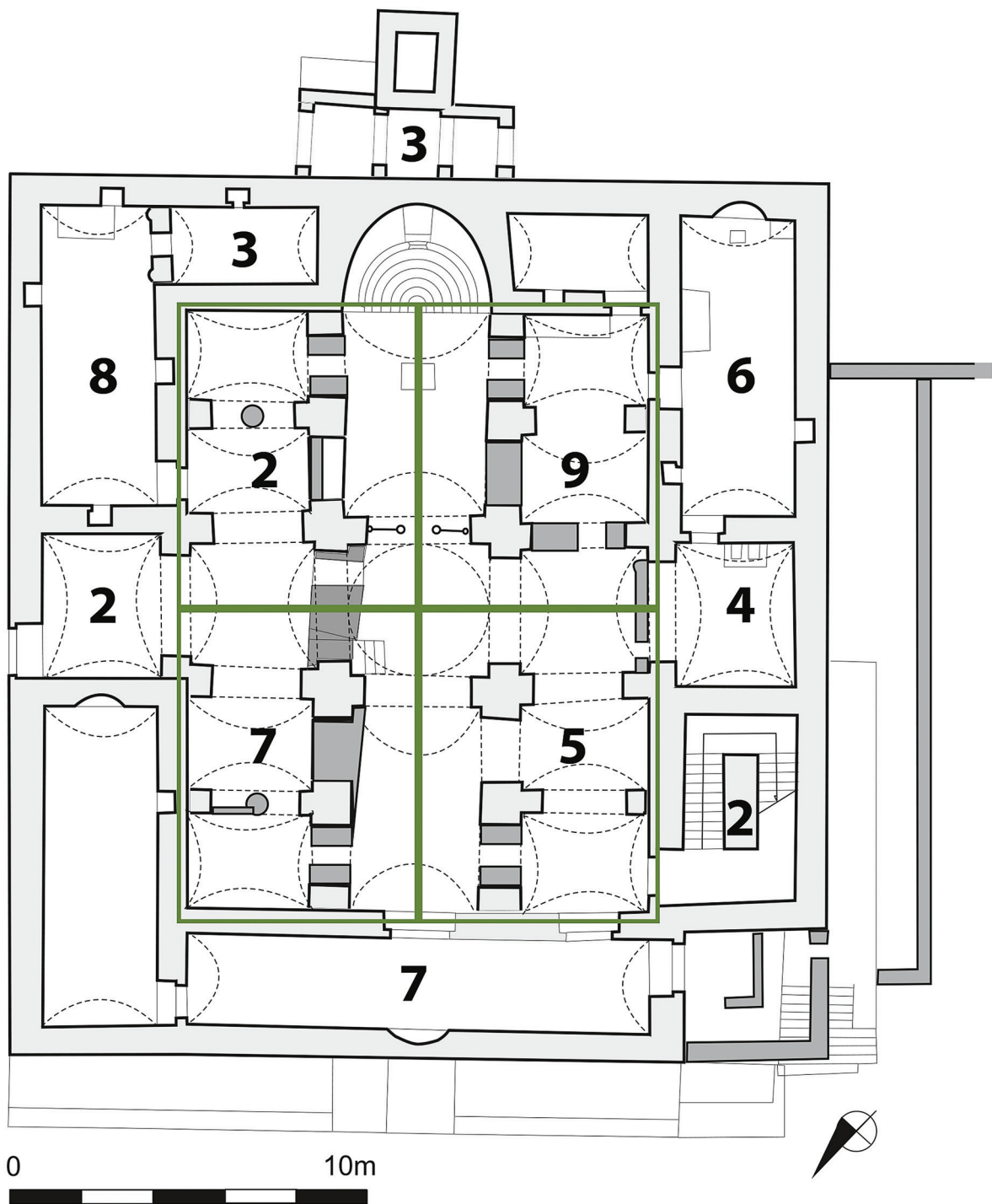


Fig. 11. Distribution of visitor's mementos in the cathedral. Drawing by D. Zielińska, with author's additions

two particular occasions or these particular persons so special that they were so deserving of this form of commemoration. Whatever the reason, according to the principles of medieval *memoria*, the resulting texts were pure acts of remembrance:⁹⁸ their very presence in the cathedral immortalized the names of the benefactors and their merits both before God and in the eyes of fellow believers.

Finally, the most popular way of memorializing an individual, apparently accessible to all regardless of their social and economic standing, was to leave one's own memento or prayer on the wall of a church.⁹⁹ Fifty-eight such texts have so far been identified in the cathedral and have been edited;¹⁰⁰ others await publication. Their distribution in the interior shows that the faithful had access to practically every area of the church (fig. 11).

Mementos can take elaborate forms, but their core is the personal presentation of the visitor, including name, patro- or metronymic, and possibly the titles or names of fulfilled civil or ecclesiastical functions.¹⁰¹ While the primary function of all these texts is as a stand-alone intercession, intended to evoke a prayer for their protagonists after they have left the cathedral, the presentation lemmata, sometimes quite detailed, shift the focus onto the authors themselves. Thus, when the inscription was read by subsequent visitors, not only was the act of prayer accomplished, but, by reading the

personal details of the authors, their memory was also perpetuated among new audiences.¹⁰²

The Commemorating of Events

The cathedral was a commemorative space not only for persons, but also for events. We have access to two of the latter in Faras: the founding act of the new church and the liturgy, which are commemorative acts *par excellence*.

THE NEW CATHEDRAL

As already mentioned, the cathedral of Faras was entirely rebuilt at the beginning of the eighth century, during the episcopate of Paulos. The new edifice had a cruciform plan, with the arms of the cross forming the main nave and the transversal aisle (fig. 3). According to archaeologists and architects, this particular plan was a Nubian invention, more specifically, the work of architects and builders from Dongola, the capital of the kingdom. The so-called Church of the Granite Columns at Dongola, dated to the second half of the seventh century,¹⁰³ is believed to be a model for this type of spatial arrangement elsewhere in Nubia.¹⁰⁴

and Money: A Preliminary Presentation," in Anderson and Welsby, *Fourth Cataract and Beyond*, 971–76).

98 O. G. Oexle, "Memoria in der Gesellschaft und in der Kultur des Mittelalters," in *Modernes Mittelalter: Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. J. Heinze (Frankfurt am Main, 1994), 297–323, at 308: "Denn es ist der Vorgang der Namensnennung, der Namenrezitation, der für die Memoria konstitutiv ist." Generally on the concept of *memoria* in medieval studies, see Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 48–49; Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, "Introduction."

99 For an exhaustive analysis of the phenomenon of visitors' inscriptions from the upper church at Banganarti, but pertaining to the whole of Christian Nubia, see A. Łajtar, *A Late Christian Pilgrimage Centre in Nubia: The Evidence of Wall Inscriptions in the Upper Church at Banganarti*, *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* Suppl. 39 (Leuven, 2020), 3–89.

100 See n. 20.

101 Various types of acclamations and invocations of holy figures scratched on the walls of sacred spaces should also be classified as visitors' inscriptions, but they are anonymous and hence excluded from the present discussion.

102 There is, of course, the matter of the legibility and readability of all these texts, which might have excluded their ever having been read by anyone. Some inscriptions, especially the painted ones, were executed in such a small script that they could have been read only upon close inspection. However, the incised texts were normally written in large, easily decipherable characters. The script was quite uniform, the so-called Nubian-type majuscule; only in some more prominent dipinti did it display an ornamental character, but definitely not enough to hinder reading. The texts use many abbreviations, sigla, and numerical cryptograms, but they are so widespread in Nubian written sources that there can be no doubt that a literate person could decipher them effortlessly. For the question of legibility and readability of ancient and medieval inscriptions, see, e.g., A. Eastmond, "Introduction: Viewing Inscriptions," in idem, *Viewing Inscriptions*, 1–9, at 3–5.

103 W. Godlewski, "The Churches of Dongola, Their Origin and Importance in the General Line of Development of Church Architecture in Makuria," in *Acta Nubica: Proceedings of the X International Conference of Nubian Studies, Rome 9–14 September 2002*, ed. I. Caneva and A. Roccati (Rome, 2006), 263–86, at 276–78. P. M. Gartkiewicz, *The Cathedral in Old Dongola and Its Antecedents*, Nubia 1; Dongola 2 (Warsaw, 1990), 247–48, dates its construction to the second half of the eighth century.

104 W. Godlewski, "The Role of Dongolese Milieu in the Nubian Church Architecture," in *ΘΕΜΕΛΙΑ: Spätantike und koptologische Studien. Peter Grossmann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Krause and S. Schaten, Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients 3 (Wiesbaden, 1998), 127–35, at 130; idem, "Churches of Dongola," esp. 276–78. The building is commonly referred to as the cathedral of

Moreover, the inspiration for the major constructional changes at Faras at the end of the tenth century also appears to have come from Dongola. At the turn of the tenth century, the flat roof of the Church of the Granite Columns was replaced with a central dome, and exactly the same happened sometime later at Faras.¹⁰⁵

The construction and subsequent reconstruction of Faras Cathedral can be viewed as simply following architectural trends coming from the capital. However, taking into account the moment of the erection of Paulos's cathedral during the reign of King Merkourios (696 or 697–after 710), its new form seems to have been of symbolic and ideological import. Merkourios was dubbed the “New Constantine” by John the Deacon,¹⁰⁶ an epithet that in the Byzantine Empire was used to describe the ruler “as righteous, moderate, orthodox and above all victorious, and the period of his rule as the peaceful time of rejuvenation or restoration of the splendid past.”¹⁰⁷ With regard to this Nubian king, however, it tends to be interpreted as referring to the fact that Merkourios subordinated the Nubian church to the Alexandrian patriarchate.¹⁰⁸

When Christianity came to the Middle Nile Valley in the mid-sixth century, the region boasted three kingdoms: Nobadia in the north, Alwa in the

south, and Makuria between them.¹⁰⁹ Then, at some point, Makuria somehow managed to incorporate its northern neighbor. We know neither the circumstances nor even an approximate date of this event.¹¹⁰ The unification appears to have been not only political, but also religious. It is commonly believed that before the unification, the two kingdoms belonged to two opposing denominations: Makuria was Chalcedonian and Nobadia anti-Chalcedonian.¹¹¹ However, when Nobadia became a part of Makuria, the whole kingdom turned uniformly to the anti-Chalcedonian doctrine.¹¹² We have no idea when and how the Nubian church was unified and how this was related to the political unification of the kingdoms, on the one hand, and the subordination to Alexandria, on the other. Noticing extraordinary building activity during the reign of King Merkourios, attested epigraphically on the territory of the former Kingdom of Nobadia (Faras and Tafa)¹¹³ and archaeologically in the heartland of Makuria (Dongola and the monastery of Ghazali),¹¹⁴ Godlewski

Dongola, but see n. 5 above for a possible overhauling of this description; note that the Church of the Granite Columns is located outside the city walls, which raises some doubts about its episcopal character.

105 Godlewski, “Churches of Dongola,” 281–82. Gartkiewicz (*Cathedral*, 319–20) proposed a date at the turn of the eleventh century. Note, however, that the dating of both the erection and subsequent rebuilding of the Church of the Granite Columns is based mainly on circumstantial evidence, as the excavations did not unearth any conclusive dating material. It is hoped that current research at the site will shed new light on the history of Nubian ecclesiastical architecture and allow verification of the existing theories.

106 Quoted in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* (trans. in G. Vantini, *Oriental Sources Concerning Nubia* [Heidelberg and Warsaw, 1975], 40).

107 Mierzejewska, “Murals in the Bishops' Chapel,” 287. For the mythology of Constantine the Great in the Byzantine Empire, see P. Magdalino, ed., *New Constantines: The Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries*, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies Publications 2 (Aldershot, UK, 1994).

108 Monneret de Villard, *Storia*, 80–81; W. Godlewski, “The Rise of Makuria (Late 5th–8th Cent.),” in Kendall, *Nubian Studies 1998*, 52–73, at 65–66. Note, however, that there is nothing in our sources, either indigenous or external, that confirms this interpretation.

109 For the Christianization of Nubia, see, for instance, S. Richter, *Studien zur Christianisierung Nubiens*, Sprachen und Kulturen des christlichen Orients 11 (Wiesbaden, 2002), esp. 99–114; and J. H. F. Dijkstra, *Philae and the End of Ancient Egyptian Religion: A Regional Study of Religious Transformation (298–642 CE)*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 173 (Leuven, 2008), 271–304.

110 For an overview of different opinions, which place the unification at different moments of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century, see R. Werner, *Das Christentum in Nubien: Geschichte und Gestalt einer afrikanischen Kirche*, Studien zur orientalischen Kirchengeschichte 48 (Berlin, 2013), 73–77.

111 It is clear from John of Ephesus's account of the evangelization of the kingdom (*Hist. eccl.* 3.6–8; trans. in Richter, *Studien*, 46–50) that Nobadia was anti-Chalcedonian. The religious identity of Makurians at this early stage is much more problematic, as no source explicitly states into which denomination they were baptized. Their Chalcedonian affiliation is only surmised on the basis of the complete omission of their evangelization by the anti-Chalcedonian historian John of Ephesus and his mention of their hostility to the Nobadian bishop Longinos traveling through their territory in ca. 580, while we know from John of Biclar that at this time they already were Christianized (trans. in Vantini, *Oriental Sources*, 27–28, with important supplement and bibliographic update by R. Seignobos at http://www.medievalnubia.info/dev/index.php/John_of_Biclar [accessed 21 December 2021]).

112 See, for example, Werner, *Das Christentum in Nubien*, 62–65.

113 For Faras, see below, and for Tafa, see Lajtar, “Varia Nubica XII–XIX,” 83–89.

114 For the dating of the Church of the Granite Columns at Dongola, the supposed cathedral, see above, n. 103; for the monastery at Ghazali, see A. Obluski and M. Korzeniowska, “The Dormitory of Ghazali Monastery, Sudan,” in *Across the Mediterranean—Along the*



Fig. 12. Greek foundation inscription of the cathedral. National Museum, Warsaw, inv. 234292. Photo public domain, courtesy of the National Museum, Warsaw (<https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/618257>)

suggests that this could actually have been the crowning of the subordination process initiated by the king.¹¹⁵

If so, the new architectural design of Faras Cathedral, apparently copying the Dongolese model, may have been chosen in order to accentuate the newly established ecclesiastical unity. This may also be reflected in the Greek and Coptic foundation inscriptions, which emphasize the importance of the cathedral having been erected by Bishop Paulos (fig. 12).¹¹⁶ While building inscriptions are known from northern Nubia, albeit not in large numbers,¹¹⁷ nowhere else do we find an example of such an elaborate composition. The inscriptions were executed on stone blocks inserted into two sides of the corner of a building located to the south of the cathedral, perhaps an *episkopeion* (fig. 2, no. 6). According to a very attractive reconstruction by Godlewski, this corner formed one side of an archway leading from a street running along the west wall of this building onto the cathedral square (fig. 13).¹¹⁸

Interestingly, the two inscriptions are not copies of the same text in two different languages. Although they share a general structure and a number of formulations, they should be seen rather as two independent but complementary compositions.¹¹⁹ Both texts display a tripartite division: they begin with the Trinitarian formula, follow with a dating lemma, and then segue to the prayer. Also, the main idea that they convey is basically the same: they are supplications

for both the church that is to be constructed and the bishop himself in his capacity as the builder of this church. As the Coptic inscription is much longer and more elaborate than its Greek counterpart, I quote it here in extenso:

In the name of the Holy Trinity, consubstantial and life-giving, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

In the reign of he whom God crowned, the Christ-loving king Merkourios, in the eleventh year of his reign, while the wholly praiseworthy and most famous Lord Markos, the illustrious and the great eparch, administered the kingdom, in the sixth indiction, in the four-hundred-and-twenty-third year of the era since Diocletian, was laid the foundation of this holy place—worthy to celebrate in it—of the catholic and apostolic church, through the care and the desire for the things of God of the most saintly and wholly virtuous holy father Abba Paulos, the prelate and bishop of the town of Pachoras, in order that the Lord God Almighty, he who bore all these sufferings for his holy Church, so as to erect the unshakeable foundation, that which Christ built on the firm rock which he himself is, may let his (i.e., the bishop's) commemoration last forever together with the church of the firstborn who are in Heaven, and that he may make him worthy as well of (hearing) the mouth and the utterance full of joy which he (i.e., Christ) bestowed upon the great apostle Peter, saying: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it," and that he may protect him as he takes care of his holy churches over a long, peaceful period, and that he may lay down under his feet all enemies who will plan to harm him, and that he may fortify him, and may cause him to be a firm foundation for the establishment and development of his holy churches, through the intercession and the prayers of the twelve apostles and all the spiritual powers which assemble in this holy place, worthy of veneration.

For thou indeed art the helper who prevails in everything, the Father and the Son and the

Nile: Studies in Egyptology, Nubiology and Late Antiquity Dedicated to László Török on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday, ed. T. A. Bács, Á. Bollók, and T. Vida, 2 vols. (Budapest, 2018), 2:601–11, at 611.

115 Godlewski, "Rise of Makuria," 66. Note that the example of Ghazali was unknown to him.

116 See above, n. 22.

117 Apart from Faras Cathedral and Tafa (see above, n. 113), they were found in Kalabsha (Richter, *Studien*, 163), Ichmindi (F. W. Deichmann and P. Grossmann, *Nubische Forschungen*, Archäologische Forschungen 17 [Berlin, 1988], 81–88), Dendur (Richter, *Studien*, 164–72), and Qasr Ibrim (A. Łajtar and J. van der Vliet, *Qasr Ibrim: The Greek and Coptic Inscriptions*, *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* Suppl. 13 [Warsaw, 2010], nos. 1–4).

118 Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 79–82, with fig. 64. His reconstruction is indirectly supported by the fact that building inscriptions tended to be placed in liminal spaces, marking passages from one place to another (Papalexandrou, "Echoes of Orality," 166, 173–75, for a specific function of cornerstones and inscriptions placed on them). An archway could certainly be such a liminal passage.

119 Possibly even authored by a single person (van der Vliet, *Catalogue*, 10).

Holy life-giving Spirit, now and forever, until all
ages of ages. Amen.

Written in the epagomenal month on the fifth (day).¹²⁰

In his analysis of this text, Jacques van der Vliet pays attention to “the concept of the dual nature of the Church, as a terrestrial and as a spiritual, celestial entity,”¹²¹ around which the prayer of the inscription develops: the celestial “Church of the Firstborn” (lines 11–12: ΤΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΠΝΩΡΨΜΙΣΕ)¹²² versus the terrestrial “this holy place . . . of the Catholic and Apostolic church” (line 7: ΠΕΙΤΟΠΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ . . . ΝΤΕ ΤΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗ ΔΥΩ ΝΑΠΟCΤΟΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ).¹²³ In the present context, however, we may add another interpretative layer, that of the double meaning of *ekklesia*, both a building and an institution. Then the phrase “may [God] cause him to be a firm foundation for the establishment

120 ρῆ πρᾶν ἡτεριας ετοῦααβ ἡζομοογσιον ἀὼω ηρεφτανζο
| πειωτ μῆ πωηρε μῆ πη(εὐν)α ετοῦααβ. ρραῖ ρῆ τῆντερο
ἡπενταπνοῡ|τε στεφανοῡ ἡνοϋ ἀὼω πηαῖχρ(ιστο)с ηρρο
μερκοῡριος ρῆ τμερῆντοϋε ἡρονπ | ἡτεφῆντερο ере πпанеуφῆнос
ἀὼω πεῡκλεεστατος πκῡρ(ιοс) ηαρκос πολλοϋс|τριос ἀὼω
πнос ηεπαρχос διοικει ητηῆτερο ρη οектнс ἡнаδиктiонос ρη
тμερ|τοϋεϋχοϋτωῡηῆτε ηρονπ ηпexponos зин διοκληтиanos
αcταρο ератῆ ἡῖι τῆῆτε | ηπειτοс ετοῦααβ ηφοϋῡηρε ηηгтц
нте тκαθoлиκн ἀὼω ἡαποcтолиκн εκκλнcia ριτῆ | тинтцѡроϋϋ
ἀὼω ηρεφепῡηnei εнапnoῡте <ηте> πpαγiωтаτος ἀὼω πпанаретос
νειωт | ετοῦααβ авва παγλος ηεπpоeαpос ἀὼω ηеписко(пос)
ηтποlic παχωpас зекас ерепxоeic πноϋте πпан|токpатop παι
ἡтаϋϋπпeиpиce тнpoϋ ρα тeчeкκλнcia ετοῦααβ ѡантѣтаzo еpатῆ
ἡтсῆте ἡаткиη | тентапex(пisto)с котс еpра ехῆ тпeтpа еттаxрнῡ
ете ηтоϋ он ηе ηακαпeφpπпeеϋе еqиηηη eвол μῆ тeкκλнcia |
ηηωpῡπпис етῆῆ ηппῡе ἀὼω он ἡῡааϋ ἡппoῡа η<т>таpо ἀὼω
тeфeиe етмeρ ηpαϋе ἡтаϋχα|pize ηнос ηппpос ηαποcтоλος ηетpос
зе ἡток ηе ηетpос ἀὼω еpра ехῆ тпeтpа тῡаκωт ηтаεκκλнcia |
ἀὼω ἡпγλн ἡаηῆте ηасeφpῆноη еpос аη ἡῡῡаpеρ еpоϋ еϋϋ ηпpооϋϋ
ηηеϋеκκλнcia ετοῦααβ | ἡοῡнос ἡxponos ἡepиηηηκон ἡῡкаθῡπотасce
ρa ηеϋоϋерηте ἡхaхе ηиη етпaмeеϋе еппe|оооϋ еpоϋη еpоϋ ἡῡῡῡоη
ηаϋ ἀὼω ηттpеϋϋωппe ηeῆте еϋтаxрнῡ етсῡстасic ἀὼω ἡпpоко|пн
ἡηеϋеκκλнcia ετοῦααβ ρиτῆ ηepесвеia μῆ ἡсопс ἡпῡнтcноϋс
ἡаποcтоλος | μῆ ἡῡоη тнpoϋ ἡноерон етсωoϋρ еpоϋη ептопос
ετοῦααβ ἡϋоϋпpоcкῡηηи ηаϋ | етῡηаϋ зe ἡток гар ηе пвоноос
етῡῡоη ρῆ ρωв ηиη πειωт μῆ πωηре μῆ πe|пн(εὐн)а ετοῦααβ
ἡρεφτανζο тeноϋ ἀὼω ηоϋоeиη ηиη ѡа ηаioη тнpoϋ ἡἡаioη ρаηиη.
| ἐϋpάφῃ μῡηῡ (I. μῡηῡ) ἐπαϋομῆν(αv) πῆμ<π>тῡс (transcr. and trans.,
with slight modifications, after van der Vliet, *Catalogue*, 4–9).

121 Van der Vliet, *Catalogue*, II.

122 Absent from the Greek inscription.

123 The same phrase in the Greek text, lines 8–9: τὸν σεπτὸν τόπον
τῆς καθολικῆς καὶ ἀποστολ<ι>κῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκλη(σ)ίας (transcr.
after Łajtar and Twadecki, *Catalogue*, 261).

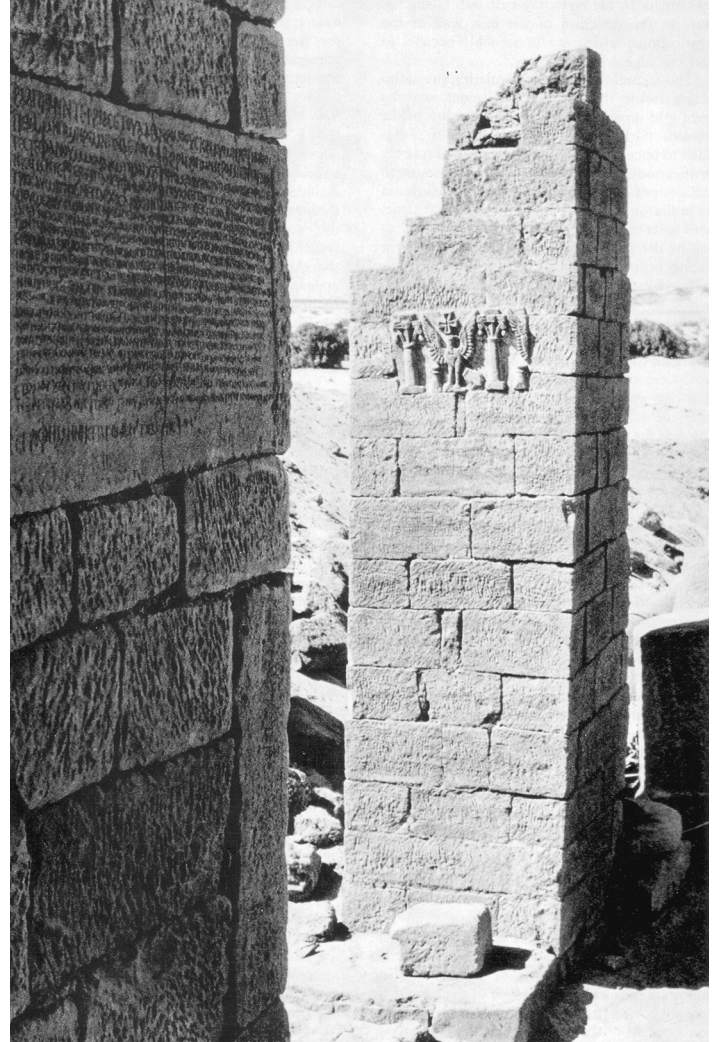


Fig. 13. Entrance to the cathedral square with the Coptic foundation inscription and the frieze from Aetios's cathedral *in situ*. Photo by M. Niepokólczycki, courtesy of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw

and development of His holy churches" (lines 16–17: *ⲛⲓⲧⲣⲉⲓⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲉ ⲛⲉ̅ⲛⲧⲉ ⲉⲓⲧⲁⲃⲣⲏⲅ ⲉⲧⲉⲥⲧⲁⲥⲓⲥ ⲁⲅⲱ ⲛⲓⲡⲣⲟⲕⲟⲡⲏ ⲛⲏⲉⲓⲉⲕⲕⲏⲥⲓⲁ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲁⲁⲃ*)¹²⁴ could be taken to mean not only the physical act of erecting an edifice, but also the institutional act of constructing a new community by embracing the superiority of the

124 Absent from the Greek inscription.

archbishops of both Alexandria and Dongola by the Nobadian hierarchs.¹²⁵

An indication that Bishop Paulos saw in the erection of the new cathedral a symbolic “new beginning” is that a fragment of the apse frieze coming from the dismantled cathedral of Aetios was immured on the opposite side of the archway that featured the building inscriptions (fig. 13).¹²⁶ During the original foundation act, this “symbol of the old order,” as Godlewski calls it, was clearly intended to connect the past with the future, the new cathedral to be built in this spot, through the intermediary of the present, the text of the inscription. Moreover, the written word not only served here as a temporal link, but also gave voice to two “speechless” material objects, the cathedral and the frieze, by contextualizing them: without it, their symbolism would be difficult if not impossible to uncover. Each subsequent recitation of the texts was a reenactment of this spatio-temporal triangle. Even when the cathedral was already built, the supplicatory character of the inscriptions made the reader/listener look into the future while remembering the past (the foundation of the cathedral) and contemplating the present (the building before one’s eyes).

The Coptic inscription prays that “Lord God Almighty . . . may let his [i.e., Paulos’s] commemoration last forever together with the Church of the Firstborn who are in Heavens” (lines 9–12: ερεπλχοεις πνοϋτε ππαντοκρατωρ . . . νακαπερπμееϋε εϋμην εβολ μῆ τεκκλησια ννοϋρπμисε). And indeed, the inscriptions must have remained visible for a very long time. At some point, brick structures were erected on both sides of the archway, covering up the Greek text and the frieze from Aetios’s cathedral, but the Coptic text remained on display.¹²⁷ Even after the rebuilding of the cathedral at the turn of the eleventh century and the subsequent changes made to its interior and exterior, the inscription still fulfilled its commemorative function by reminding beholders about an event of great importance in the history of northern Nubia in general and Faras in particular.

LITURGICAL COMMEMORATIONS

As both an institution and a community of believers, the church is all about memory. Its central part, the Eucharist, is nothing other than the commemoration of the Last

Supper, performed at the explicit command of Jesus Christ, and to be reenacted in his memory. Throughout the liturgical year, innumerable smaller or bigger occasions for commemoration are planned, repeated annually in a perpetual circle of ritual continuity.¹²⁸

The Eucharist is, of course, the central and basic mode of commemorating an event from salvation history, but definitely not the only one. Such commemorations, especially those of holy figures, can also be undertaken individually. This individual commemorative mode is possible thanks to the presence of images of venerated figures, whether sculptures, icons, mosaics, or wall paintings.¹²⁹ Nubian churches, including Faras Cathedral, were no different in this regard, replete as they were with holy images painted on the walls and forming the liturgical program of decoration; and indeed, the paintings were privately venerated, as confirmed by inscribed visitor’s mementos and prayers invoking a given saint right next to this saint’s depiction, as in the case of St. Epiphanius, whose name can be deciphered in three out of four personal inscriptions painted to his left (fig. 14).¹³⁰

To ensure proper recognition, the wall paintings were supplied with captions, mostly of names of personages (or items, such as “cradle” in the nativity scene, or “cross”), but sometimes also with quotations from the scriptures. This was, of course, not the only or primary function of such texts: in a theological sense, they first and foremost sanctified the images and linked them with their prototypes.¹³¹ However, their “indicative” function¹³² came to the fore when less common scenes

128 For the concept of ritual continuity, see Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 70–74 and passim. For calendrical rites, see P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, 1989), 45, 65–66; for the ritualistic character of Christian liturgy, pp. 36–47, 70.

129 On the individual perception of holy images in Byzantine churches, see, e.g., L. James, *Mosaics in the Medieval World: From Late Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2017), 140.

130 For the painting, see Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras/Faras*, no. 137. For the inscriptions, see Jakobielski, “Inscriptions,” nos. 36, 37, and 48.

131 For instance, K. Boston, “The Power of Inscriptions and the Trouble with Texts,” in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies Presented to Robin Cormack*, ed. A. Eastmond and L. James (Aldershot, UK, 2003), 35–57; Jolivet-Lévy, “Inscriptions et images,” 382–84. Cf., for images without captions, H. Maguire, “Eufrasius and Friends: On Names and Their Absence in Byzantine Art,” in Jones, *Art and Text*, 139–60.

132 In the terminology of Grabar, “Graffiti or Proclamations,” 72–73.

125 See Godlewski, *Pachoras*, 80–81.

126 Ibid., 79–81 and fig. 25.

127 Ibid., 82, fig. 62.



Fig. 14.
Painting of St. Epiphanius.
National Museum, Warsaw,
inv. 234021. Photo public
domain, courtesy of the
National Museum, Warsaw
(<https://cyfrowe.mnw.art.pl/en/catalog/617953>)

or saints were represented, or when the appearance of the depicted or their attributes did not allow for easy recognition.¹³³ Moreover, thanks to their iconicity, realized through the use of monograms, *nomina sacra*, and an ornamental script, they were also recognizable by the illiterate.

133 See Jolivet-Lévy, “Inscriptions et images,” 386–88, who adduces examples of erroneous captions as proof of this function of captions.

The quite obvious identifying role of captions could also possess a memorial aspect. Christian Nubian wall paintings, or practically any kind of figural works of art for that matter, could be a medium of memory. They are comparable here with modern-day photography, the memorial function of which has been analyzed by Astrid Erll.¹³⁴ In fact, we may quote her, substituting “wall painting” for “photographs,” that this medium

134 Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 134–39.

is essentially non-narrative. Taken by itself, a [wall painting] does not tell a story. . . . What [wall painting] needs in order to function as a medium of memory is narrative contextualization, either by captions that come with it or by stories that surround or emerge from it.¹³⁵

Thus, the proper recognition of the image, made possible or at least facilitated by the caption, even in its simplest form, could work as a “cue” for memory, evoking narratives connected with the depicted scene or person. In such a way, an unidentified visitor to Faras Cathedral, identifying the image of St. Epiphanius on the wall, recollected the saint’s combat against the Manicheans, which the visitor must have heard or read somewhere, and wrote in a memento, “Thou hast denounced (?) devilish iniquity from the land of Persians, Saint Epiphanius.”¹³⁶

This function of captions as mnemonic devices is even clearer in the case of captions that include quotations from the scriptures. Three have been identified in Faras Cathedral: John 1:1–2 painted on a book held by enthroned Christ,¹³⁷ John 1:29–33 inscribed on a scroll held by John the Baptist,¹³⁸ and John 20:27 accompanying the scene of Jesus and Doubting Thomas.¹³⁹ Although they may have played an identifying role as well, their presence could have triggered the recollection of a proper biblical scene, and, especially when only the incipit of the text was inscribed, the recitation of the rest of the passage.¹⁴⁰

135 Ibid., 135.

136 Πέρσον (I. Πέρσων) τῆς γῆς κακία διαβολῇ ἐκδεῖδας? ΟΥΣ ὅσις Ἐπιφάνιε (transcr. and trans. after Jakobielski, “Inscriptions,” no. 36). Only the first line of the dipinto is legible; lines 2 and 3, containing the visitor’s (self-)presentation, cannot be deciphered.

137 Jakobielski et al., *Pachoras, Faras*, no. 89.

138 Ibid., no. 110.

139 Ibid., no. 41.

140 I borrow this interpretation from Jolivet-Lévy, “Inscriptions et images,” 388–92, who ascribes this mnemonic function to yet another type of caption, absent from Faras (and generally from Nubia), namely, dialogical inscriptions from the scene of the annunciation. An interesting comparison of such inscriptions with lectionaries is made in R. S. Nelson, “Image and Inscription: Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of Devotion,” in James, *Art and Text*, 100–119, at 108. Here, however, a functional resemblance to another kind of liturgical book seems more appropriate, namely, the *typika*, which contained only the incipits (and sometimes also explicits) of the biblical readings for all

Educational Services

Finally, Faras Cathedral appears to have contributed not only to the preservation and propagation of memorializing events and individuals, but also to the training of the memory of the faithful, as the walls of the church bear witness to teaching activities. Fourteen inscriptions that can be generally labeled “school texts” have been identified in the cathedral.¹⁴¹ They occur in different locations (fig. 15), but they should all most probably be dated to the same late period in the twelfth to thirteenth century. The most interesting is a cluster written on the outer southern façade of the building. It includes as many as three Coptic alphabets,¹⁴² a set of vowels,¹⁴³ two exercises in writing one’s signature,¹⁴⁴ and three unidentified texts of undoubtedly the same nature.¹⁴⁵ Inside the cathedral, we find two more alphabets,¹⁴⁶ another set of vowels,¹⁴⁷ a list of numbers from twelve to sixteen,¹⁴⁸ and a list of Greek words starting with the letter *phi* plus subsequent vowels.¹⁴⁹

As observed by Adam Łajtar,¹⁵⁰ the inscriptions were located in less prominent parts of the cathedral and in one case outside of the building, places that could have been easily used as classrooms without causing any disturbance to the liturgical practices.¹⁵¹ The

days of the liturgical year, and served to help the lector to find the rest of the reading, either in another manuscript or from memory.

141 Adam Łajtar is preparing a new edition and a study of all such texts known from medieval Nubia. I would like to thank him for sharing with me his manuscript, in which the texts from Faras Cathedral are edited as nos. IX 1–14. Below, however, I refer the reader to previous publications.

142 Jakobielski, “Inscriptions chrétiennes,” no. 10 A, B, and G.

143 Ibid., no. 10 D.

144 Ibid., no. 10 C and I. Deciphering them is difficult, but in his forthcoming publication (n. 141), Adam Łajtar suggests that they are both in Old Nubian and should read ΔΙ ΠΕΤΡΟ ΠΑΕΙΣΕΛΟ, “I, Petro, have written (this)”; in his view, no. 10 C was the model text written by the teacher and 10 I was a student’s copy.

145 Ibid., no. 10 E, F, and H.

146 Jakobielski, “Coptic Graffiti,” 136; idem, “Inscriptions,” 307–8.

147 Kubińska, *Inscriptions grecques*, no. 129.

148 Kubińska, “Prothesis,” no. 70.

149 Kubińska, “Inscription scolaire sur les murs de la cathédrale de Faras,” *Études et travaux* 15 (1990): 225–29. The text reads Φαρές | Φαῖσον | Φῆστος | Φιρσοος | Φοῖβην | Φοῦ | Φω. . ν.

150 See above, n. 141.

151 But note an exceptional case of one of these texts recorded in the apse of the Church of St. Paul at Tamit; S. Donadoni, “Iscrizioni,” in *Tamit (1964): Missione archeologica in Egitto dell’Università di*

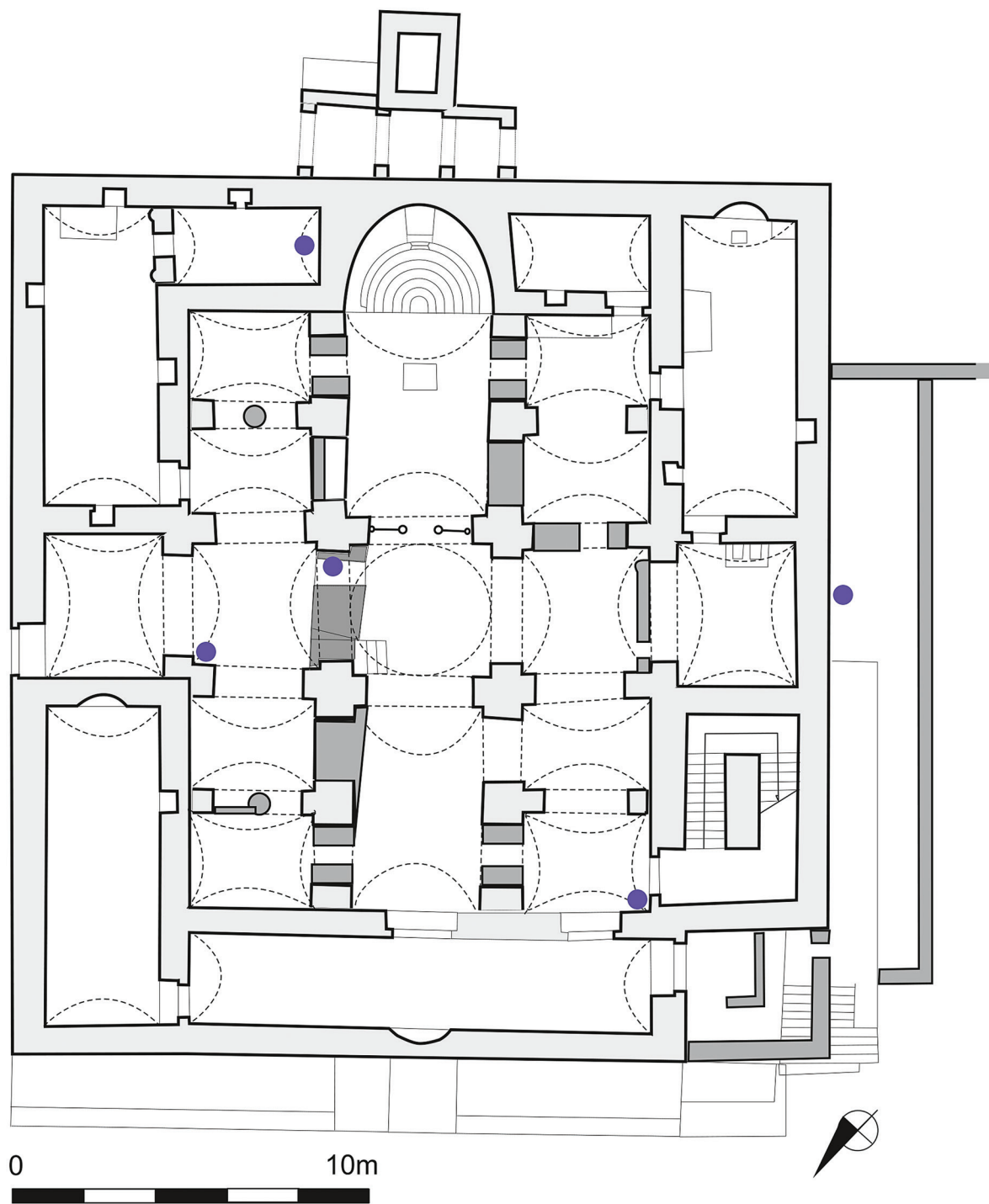


Fig. 15. Distribution of school texts in the cathedral. Drawing by D. Zielińska, with author's additions

inscriptions, he argues, were model texts executed by the teacher on the wall, and the pupils, probably seated on the floor, were supposed to practice the models on some other writing materials, most plausibly potsherds. Although we do not have any information on who the teachers were, it is reasonable to suppose that they were clergymen or monastics. This is based directly on the observation that the overwhelming majority of Nubian school texts originate from ecclesiastic or monastic contexts, and indirectly on the fact that clergymen and monks must have formed the literary elite of the Nubian society. In this way, the cathedral of Faras, and the institutions of the Nubian church in general, not only contributed to perpetuating the memories of the church and the kingdom, but also provided the faithful with skills for both a proper reception of these memories and their further dissemination.

The Cathedral as a Memorial Monument

Let us now see if the presented case study provides us with the answers to the *what*, the *by whom*, the *how*, and the *why of memoria Nubiana*. The third question, the *how*, is perhaps the easiest to answer. From what we can see in the gathered material, Faras Cathedral was the keeper and broadcaster of memory, in its multiple meanings and functions. The memory of the Nubian past was transmitted through the compound's intricate network of architecture, image, and text, in which all elements were supplemented by and defined through one another. Thus, visitors to the cathedral assimilated various pieces of information through what they saw, read, and heard. Here, the sense of sight was certainly essential, with wall paintings being the most powerful conveyors of memories accessible for both the literate and the illiterate. While the literate had immediate access to writings, which enhanced their perception of the messages encoded in the cathedral, the illiterate had recourse to hearing, whether clergymen celebrating religious ceremonies or their fellow literate believers reading the inscriptions to them.

The answer to *what* is also possible on the basis of the presented material. The analysis allows distinguishing several categories of memory broadcast in the cathedral complex:

Roma (Rome, 1967), 61–74, no. 19; to be reedited by Lajtar (no. VII 1; see n. 141).

Religious memory. The primary function of a church is to commemorate significant events and persons in acts of religious memory. At Faras, religious memory was stimulated naturally through participation in liturgical services, but also through numerous wall paintings and their inscriptions.

Institutional (ecclesiastic) memory. By keeping a current list of bishops, at least up to a certain point, the cathedral staff took good care to record the history of their bishopric. The memory was kept alive by the periodical commemoration of previous prelates and vivified by their portraits placed throughout the interior. If my interpretation of Bishop Paulos's foundation inscriptions is credible, the memory of unification of the two churches, Nobadian and Makurian, was also preserved in the cathedral.

Political memory. As well as a display of their authority, the portraits of kings and queen mothers and the possible list of kings on the walls of the cathedral are a clear sign of a political memory being cultivated in the building. It is conceivable that regular commemorative services were held for the deceased kings and queen mothers.

Eschatological memory. The memory of the deceased was a constant element of liturgical celebrations, but in the cathedral it took a more literal form owing to the proximity of the bishops' tombs. The faithful could see and read their epitaphs. In this way they were reminded of the eternal bliss and happiness awaiting them in the afterlife, provided they followed their shepherds' example in leading a pious and good life.

(Auto)biographical memory. Visitors' inscriptions and prayers covering the walls of the cathedral testify to the need to immortalize one's name in acts of (auto)biographical memory. This was done most of all for God's eyes, but also, even if only secondarily, for the eyes of fellow believers. The better-off members of the community went so far as to boast about their contribution to the cathedral in the form of wall paintings.

Memory training ground. Finally, the cathedral served as a sort of memory training ground, providing a space for pupils to learn literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, this educational activity not only involved purely technical aspects of basic human literacy, but combined all the abovementioned memory settings.

There can be no doubt that all these different memories present in Faras Cathedral were intended for all who frequented the church, regardless of their social

status and level of literacy. By taking part in liturgical ceremonies, or by simply walking around, visitors to the cathedral absorbed a lesson in religion and history. They had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with, on the one hand, Christian theological concepts, truths of faith, crucial events, and notables, and, on the other, the history of both the bishopric and the kingdom. They could take part in reading and writing lessons, and then leave their own memento for God and fellow believers to remember them by.

As for *by whom* the cathedral's memorial landscape was formed, the primary role should be assigned to the ecclesiastical staff: they were in charge of properly nurturing their flock in terms of both a religion and earthly education, and were responsible for ensuring proper religious commemorative practices. They were also entrusted with keeping alive the memory of their predecessors and their rulers. However, the clergy was not an exclusive agent; as said, the sacral space was open for the faithful to contribute to its memorial dimension, either by having their name commemorated together with a painting they donated, or by simply writing a prayer (or having it written) on the wall.

The final question, *why* all of this was remembered at the cathedral, is certainly the most difficult. One way to view it is through the perspective of the primary religious function of the building, in which all the elements are by definition for the greater glory of God, and God and his saints are their primary addressees. However, by the very fact of functioning within a space actively used by the people, a human aspect was forged—almost as if the memory of the human was a by-product of the memory of the divine. It is more probable, however, that both components, the human and the divine, were interwoven in a complex memorial design: the divine was also destined for man, and the human also for God. Thus, in the eyes of the Nubians, human history would be but a part of the divine plan, which is why the safekeeping of its memory was entrusted to the church.

Medieval Nubia and the Theory of Memory Studies

In this final section I would like to offer some theoretical considerations concerning this memory studies approach to medieval Nubia. They are by no means a comprehensive and exhaustive discussion of its different

aspects, but merely some remarks on various concepts current in memory studies that feature in the material from Faras Cathedral and can be placed in a wider perspective of Christian Nubian culture.

One of the key concepts analyzed by Assmann in his *Cultural Memory and Early Civilisation* is that of two “modes of remembering,” foundational memory and biographical memory, which correspond to two “memory frames,” cultural and communicative memory.¹⁵² The first mode is defined as referring to origins *sensu largo*, operating with “fixed objectifications” and being largely constructed, the second as concerning personal experience transferred by means of social interaction, and, as such, subject to natural growth.

Let us first consider foundational memory. Three events from Nubian history are conceivable as providing the foundational myths of medieval Nubian statehood: the Christianization of the kingdoms in the mid-sixth century, the unification of Nobadia and Makuria in the seventh century, and the subordination of the Nubian church to the Alexandrian patriarchate at the turn of the seventh century (if the last two indeed happened separately; see above, § “The New Cathedral”).

However, hardly any vestiges of the two first events have been preserved. The memory of the Christianization has to date been found only in a single source: a wall inscription from the church installed in a pharaonic temple at Tafa (northern Nubia), commemorating the renovation of this church and dated to the first half of the seventh century.¹⁵³ The text mentions the accepting of the new faith (most probably in Nobadia) during the reign of an otherwise unknown king Iarolt, and evidently treats it as a turning point of Nubian history; two other events, the consecration of the church and its later renovation, are dated in relation to the Christianization act.¹⁵⁴ Also, the two “heroes” of

152 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 34–41.

153 The text has been known since the nineteenth century, but remained unidentified (see, for example, an attempt at an edition by G. Lefebvre, *Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d'Égypte* [Cairo, 1907], no. 615). Thanks to the newly discovered drawing of the inscription made by William John Bankes (d. 1855), the contents of the text could finally be revealed. Adam Lajtar and I are preparing the first edition of this important inscription.

154 This, however, does not mean the introduction of a new era. Rather, to precisely date all the events, the text uses the indictional system, universal for the whole Mediterranean (see, for example, Ochalá, *Chronological Systems*, 99–124).

the Christianization of Nobadia, as portrayed by John of Ephesus—Julian, the first missionary, and Longinos, the first bishop of Nobadia¹⁵⁵—appear to be absent from Nubian history and culture.¹⁵⁶ For example, the local onomastic stock does not feature any instance of the name Julian, and Longinos is attested only three times,¹⁵⁷ which suggests the lack of a historical tradition of venerating these two figures.

As for the unification of Makuria and Nobadia, although it must have been a momentous event as well, the fact that we know neither its date nor its circumstances indicates that its commemoration did not enter Christian Nubian cultural memory. The early kings of united Makuria (eighth to ninth century) do not have any toponomastic elements in their titulature that could serve to underline their double rule, and the later ones universally use the title “King of Dotawo,” where Dotawo, the native Nubian name for Makuria,¹⁵⁸ came to designate the whole territory, including Nobadia. Nobadia appears to have had a special status as a Makurian province,¹⁵⁹ but we do not know whether

this was because it used to be an independent kingdom or because it was a frontier province.

Only in the case of the last of the three events, the unification of the Church and its subordination to Alexandria, do we have some reason to think that it came to be commemorated, at least in Faras. However, even if Godlewski’s and my interpretations are correct, the hints provided to us (and to his compatriots) by Bishop Paulos are definitely too subtle to consider them fully valid carriers of foundational memory. They seem to require too much interpretative effort, and as such would not have been accessible to the majority of society.

The biographical memory mode is much more pronounced in Christian Nubia, including Faras Cathedral. It is represented by all the elements intended to commemorate individuals: epitaphs, personalized wall inscriptions, and portraiture. Their earthly dimension (biographical elements) and evident communicatory purposes place them in the realm of communicative memory. On the other hand, their medium (stone, wall), intended to secure for them a long-lasting, possibly eternal memory, makes them a part of the monumental discourse,¹⁶⁰ and hence instruments of cultural memory.¹⁶¹

Two other concepts introduced by Assmann to the discussion of memory are ritual and textual coherence/continuity. The former is characteristic of oral cultures and focuses on repetition (myths, histories, cultic acts, etc.), and the latter, typical of written cultures, is centered on interpreting texts preserved in external media.¹⁶² However, for premodern cultures, in which orality and literacy were intrinsically connected,¹⁶³ such a clear-cut distinction is questionable. This is also true for medieval Nubia, where the texts of epitaphs and supplicatory inscriptions, which

155 For Longinos, see Richter, *Studien*, 99–108.

156 Note that our source base almost exclusively stems from the time of the united Kingdom of Makuria, which may seriously distort the picture of the cultural memory in the Kingdom of Nobadia before the unification.

157 These attestations come from relatively early sources of Nobadian origin: two epitaphs from Ginari-Tafa, seventh to ninth century, and a land sale deed from northern Nubia, eighth century. For the former, see M. G. Tibiletti Bruno, *Iscrizioni nubiane* (Pavia, Italy, 1964), no. 1, and C. M. Firth, *The Archaeological Survey of Nubia: Report for 1908–1909*, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1912), 1.1:48 [grave 486?]; and for the latter, W. C. Till, *Die koptischen Rechtsurkunden der Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek*, Corpus Papyrorum Raineri 4 (Vienna, 1958), no. 28. In addition, an ostrakon from Qasr Ibrim mentions an “*apa* Longinos, bishop.” It is tempting to equate him with the first bishop of Nobadia, but the text is written in a language, apparently some form of Nubian, that has so far defied any attempts at translation and interpretation (see E. S. Meltzer, “The Coptic Texts,” in A. J. Mills, *The Cemeteries of Qasr Ibrim: A Report of the Excavations Conducted by W. B. Emery in 1961*, Excavation Memoir 51 [London, 1982], 82–85, at 84; also Richter, *Studien*, 108). Note, however, that the use of the name in Nubia may not be related to the history of Christianization at all, but to the widespread cult in the East of the centurion Longinos, who thrust a spear into Christ’s side.

158 As opposed to Migi, the Nubian name for Nobadia.

159 See the description of Nubia in chapter 30 of al-Maqrīzī’s (d. 1442) *Khiṭaṭ* (trans. in Vantini, *Oriental Sources*, 601–5).

160 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 149–52, for the concept of “monumental discourse” in ancient Egypt.

161 Ibid., 45–48, analyzes various modes of commemorating the dead, including epitaphs, as an example of such transitional forms of memory. Assmann points, however, to a different reason for the classification: “It is communicative in so far as it represents a universally human form, and it is cultural to the degree in which it produces its particular carriers, rituals, and institutions” (p. 45).

162 Ibid., 70–71, 79–81.

163 Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 117: “In the Christian Middle Ages, oral and literate memory were in equilibrium, and were indeed closely interwoven.”

employed the same formulations, phrases, and quotes over decades or even centuries, functioned on the principle of repetition. There was no need for interpretation; their sense remained unchanged from generation to generation. They became “sacred texts” that did not “require any interpretation, but simply a ritually guaranteed recitation that scrupulously observes all of the prescriptions relating to time, place, and accuracy.”¹⁶⁴ Moreover, through repeated recitation, they were included in oral circulation. On the other hand, these texts were susceptible to a potentially infinite variability, usually forming a sort of puzzle, in which common phrases were joined together according to the principle of centonization in order to form new wholes.¹⁶⁵ Also, their detailed meaning was not always identical.¹⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the general sense remained stable. It would thus seem that these types of premodern sources bridge the two continuities, which can be summarized in Table 2.

The last issue that I would like to touch upon here is the question of mediality, one of the key concepts of Astrid Erll’s approach to memory.¹⁶⁷ She defines media as “a kind of switchboard at work between the individual and the collective dimension of remembering. Personal memories can only gain social relevance through media representation and distribution,”¹⁶⁸ and claims that “mediality represents instead the very condition for the emergence of cultural memory.”¹⁶⁹ In her opinion, “everything is a medium of memory, which is understood as ‘transmitting something’ from or about the past.”¹⁷⁰ What message they carry and how they are perceived depends, on the one hand, on their creator’s intent (“production-side functionalization”) and, on the other, on the audience’s interpretation (“reception-side functionalization”).¹⁷¹ In the present discussion,

Table 2. Ritual and Textual Continuity in Nubian Epitaphs

Elements of Ritual Continuity	Elements of Textual Continuity
repetitiveness	variability
ritualistic performance	written form
orality	

the former is clearly represented by the building and its dedicatory inscriptions, epitaphs, lists of bishops, kings, and offerors. Their commemorative function was an integral part of their design, and even if the form of commemoration might have changed over time, they kept perpetuating the memories as intended by their authors. “Reception-side functionalization” is, in turn, a feature of royal/episcopal portraits and visitor’s inscriptions, which are addressed to God in the first place, but acquire a “human” dimension thanks to their presence in a public space.

These remarks are only representative of the wealth of concepts involving memory studies, and certainly do not exploit to the full the richness of Christian Nubian material. I nevertheless hope that they will pave the way for this methodology to be applied to further studies on medieval Nubia and other premodern cultures that are not blessed with an abundance of Greek, Roman, or Egyptian written sources. It also remains to be seen whether the studies of memory in these cultures can contribute to and inform the theory of memory studies. In this regard, the first results presented here do seem promising.

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164 Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 79.

165 See, for example, Treffort, *Mémoires carolingiennes*, 203–14; van der Vliet, “‘What Is Man?’” esp. 199, for funerary epigraphy.

166 For instance, some epitaphs underscored the vanity of earthly life, while others omitted this aspect and focused on life in the hereafter.


167 Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 113–43.

168 Ibid., 113.

169 Ibid., 114.

170 Ibid., 125.

171 Ibid., 124–25.

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